THE AWARD-WINNING QUARTERLY FROM
The Economist

intelligent life

THE STATE OF HOLLYWOOD
BY DAVID THOMSON

THE WHO, THE WHY
A CANDID CHAT WITH PETE TOWNSHEND

SALMAN RUSHDIE'S FAVOURITE PLACES

HOW (AND WHEN) TO MAKE A DECISION

ALAN HOLLINGHURST IN COPENHAGEN

WHERE TO DRINK IN FLORENCE

NEED A MODEL? ASK A DANCER

ON THE MARCH
China's young women, by Hilary Spurling

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 4
SUMMER 2011 €7.50
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH DAVID HOGSHOLT

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Published by The Economist Newspaper Limited, 25 St James's Street, London, SW1A 1HG, telephone +44 (0)20 7830 7000; e-mail intelligentlife@economist.com; www.moreintelligentlife.com. ISSN 1743-7424. Where opinion is expressed it is that of the author and does not necessarily coincide with the editorial views of the publisher or *The Economist*. All information in this magazine is verified to the best of the author's and the publisher's ability. However, The Economist Newspaper Limited does not accept responsibility for any loss arising from reliance on it. Printed by Wyndeham Group.

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THIS OFFICE IS a huddle of nine desks in a corner of The Economist Building. When visitors come in, we see a flicker of disappointment on their faces. The only thing they find to compliment us on is the view, which takes in Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, and, less edifyingly, the vast new ziggurat known as the Shard. Not that we have many visitors: writers and editors are big e-mailers, which is a mixed blessing – more writing practice, less human contact. But one day in February a writer did come to see us, and lit up a grey Friday afternoon.

It was Hilary Spurling, the biographer of Matisse. Her latest book is a life of Pearl Buck, the first person to write about the real lives of Chinese women, in the 1930s. I assumed Spurling had gone to China to research Buck's life, but in fact she had taken on Buck's life to spend time in China, which had fascinated her since she was a child. She talked for an hour and kept her tiny audience entranced. "That was like listening to Radio 4," our deputy art director said afterwards. Higher praise hath no one in the British media. "Can we do it every Friday?"

Spurling was due back in China on a book tour, so we asked her to write about **women in China** *(page 70)*. Her piece, both a treat and an eye-opener, shows how dramatically life has changed for many women. It is still tough by our standards – long hours, low pay, few rights. Beijing has embraced free enterprise but cannot stand free speech, as it reiterated with its treatment of the artist Ai Weiwei, bundled away at an airport on April 3rd. The fact that the authorities could not bring themselves to confirm his arrest spoke volumes. Even if he is released unharmed, the episode has been a PR debacle. Now far better known than before, Ai may be the next Aung San Suu Kyi.

This edition of *Intelligent Life* marks the end of a chapter. From August, we will publish six times a year. The magazine has been quarterly since 2007, when the editor was Ed Carr, now our editorial director. I was his deputy, and it was the first quarterly I had worked on after stints on dailies, weeklies, a fortnightly, a monthly, a yearbook and a website updated every ten minutes. In journalism, frequency is destiny, and being quarterly has enabled us to prepare slow food, to stand back from the fray and to stand out from the pack. It has also allowed us to be a bunch of part-timers, running largely on mum power.

SOPHIA SPRING

The drawback is that, by its third month on the stands, an issue may be testing the reader's patience, or getting dog-eared, or not there at all. Last winter, when we passed our financial targets for the first time, a debate arose about our frequency. We settled on going bi-monthly, which sees off the third month while securing the magazine's flavour and ecosystem. Above all, it means more chances to engage with our readers, for whose attention, as ever, we are very grateful.

It's goodbye, alas, to our joint head of ad sales, Emma Winchurch-Beale, who has been headhunted. A magazine launch demands a few good people, and our publisher knew on day one that we needed Emma. Seeing her in action, you wouldn't have guessed she was in sales. She was like an angler, seldom working up a sweat, calmly landing a big fish – and then flying home to her family near Toulouse. With her sales colleagues, Emma ensured our survival in the rough seas of 2008 and our modest success since. We wish her very well.

The good news is that we are hiring another assistant editor, to work half-time. The job will suit an experienced commissioning editor who is also a hawk-eyed sub. Please apply to intelligentlife@economist.com by June 30th. We also run internships, aimed at graduates. They mostly stay three months, carry out tasks ranging from proof-reading to research, learn a lot and even earn a little. Applicants need to show writing ability, familiarity with the magazine, some journalistic experience, and an appetite for life and our inky trade. ~ TIM DE LISLE

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Showing some backbone
Books by our contributors, and one by a guest

intelligent life

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LETTERS

Freedom to roam

Re: Digital Africa (Features, spring)

I write as a devotee of *Intelligent Life*, but J.M. Ledgard's article fell below your usual standards. It reflected an Anglo-centric view of the world, and failed to highlight the real impact of the digital age in Africa. It was, in addition, singularly focused on east Africa.

It is true that internet-network speeds are relatively slow and that PC penetration is a long way short of that in the developed world. Of greater importance, however, is the impact that mobile-phone networks themselves have had, which has been fundamental for the poorest people's ability to start trading and to eke out a living. Continent-wide roaming-free networks (now there's a trick which ought to exist in Europe) mean that the small trader (of which Africa has an abundance) can connect and trade with suppliers and customers right across the continent without the pain of roaming charges or the need to travel long distances.

I have seen with my own eyes the impact that these humble but incredibly important developments have had on Africa's poor, and while on their own they aren't solutions to the numerous economic and developmental problems that exist, I think you should have investigated them from the African point of view, rather than introducing the somewhat irrelevant matters of download speeds and the like, which seem to preoccupy European society.

Jon Sinigaglia, Qatar

Although almost no one in Africa has ever seen an iPhone, almost everyone has heard of them. If you give one to an adult – or even a child – within seconds they are using it with ease, zooming in on pictures and scrolling through music libraries. But in west Africa getting data through a phone is very expensive. Wi-Fi in cyber-cafés is much cheaper. Video and music are usually downloaded at a cyber-café and then Bluetoothed to a phone. With costs as they are I can't see anyone downloading straight to their phone in the near future.

Damian Rafferty, London W12

Google and Facebook have pivotal positions in the development and availability of technology in Africa. But in my opinion Nokia is in danger despite its 58% market share, because its relationship with the user ends with the sale of the handset. Yes they have experimented with Ovi but this has failed miserably. Soon even cheap Chinese phones will be running Android, which is the platform most likely to bring these services to Africa, unless Nokia makes a quick turnaround.

Soud Hyder

You name the Nokia 1100 the "AK-47 of communication". Brilliant! But they certainly don't float. Some fisherman told you a "fishy tale" there.

Tomas Flem

The truly good book

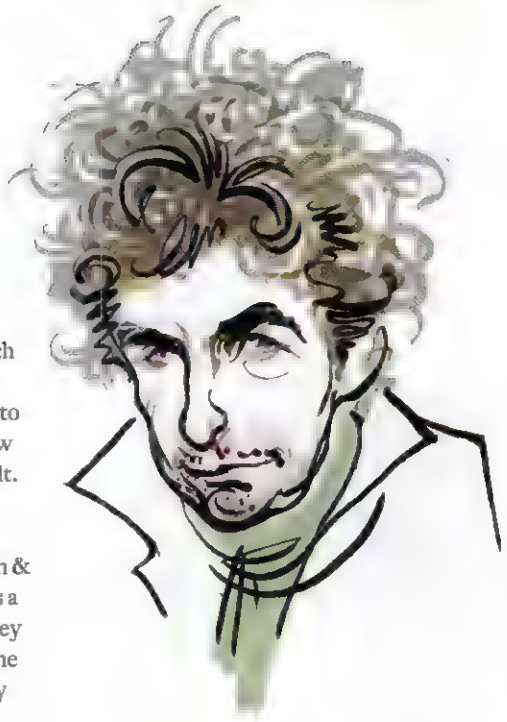
Re: In the beginning was the sound (Features, spring)

Ann Wroe is right to focus on the music of the King James Bible's language, which so many modern translations, however scholarly and "accurate", miss completely. She is also right to remind us of the debt owed to William Tyndale by the 1611 translators. The late David Daniell's magnificent edition of Tyndale's Bible, as well as his magisterial "The Bible in English" (2003), must stand alongside the King James on the shelves of anyone interested in that peculiar book's storied English life. Ann Wroe's well-chosen "best bits" are all from the Old Testament, where most of the Bible's smiting, begetting, cursing and whoring are to be found.

One small correction: the reference to the schoolboys' favourite verse in 2 Kings (the one about dung and piss) is missing the chapter number, 18. The Matthew's Bible translator (1537), almost certainly Tyndale himself, has the prosaic "dirt" for the less palatable "dung" (found in the Geneva Bible of 1560 and retained in the King James). Inevitably, from the venerable Revised Standard Version onward, "piss" has been watered down to "urine". The Good News Bible (and others) prissily dissolve "dung" into mere "excrement". Much virtue in monosyllables.

Professor Charles Whitworth, Celleneuve, France

Nothing can compare to the depth and subtlety of the Hebrew original of the Bible: the word play, the nuance, the building blocks of thought. Translation



is interpretation, but more than that each language has its own mentality, so it would be hard for the English language to capture fully the meaning of the Hebrew Bible, no matter how excellent the result.
DANIEL OSTROFF, TELZSTONE, ISRAEL

One minor quibble. You said that Simon & Garfunkel sang "To everything there is a season" (aka "Turn! Turn! Turn!"). They didn't: it was written by Pete Seeger; the version everyone has heard is a cover by the Byrds.
DAVID RADIN

From liaison to friend

Re: Breaking bad news (Features, spring)
I know Jason Clauson, the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) mentioned by Sally Williams in her article. He was the FLO assigned to my family in 2005 after the death of my brother-in-law in a motorbike accident. I could not have got through the two years which followed, including the court case, without Jason. We are still friends to this day. This report was lovely and very well written. Having been involved with FLOs, I know that their work is invaluable. Well done for bringing it to the attention of others.
ANDREA JENNER, SNODLAND, KENT

I think the delivery of bad news should be kept blunt and to the point. I will not be patronised by the politically correct in the name of "sensitivity". When my father died I was simply told. My emotional state or lack thereof is no one else's business.
STEVE MEIKLE

Dylan takes effort

Re: Forever young (Culture, spring)
It sometimes takes work to "get" Dylan. His voice is now harsher than ever – the antithesis of the Glee/X Factor/American Idol voice. But for those who persist, when Dylan clicks it's like an explosion. All the rules of listening go out the window and his magnificence opens up to you. I'm glad he is still touring, and still being true to himself, playing different songs each night and not slipping into autopilot. He'll never be perfect and that's the thing that makes him stand so tall.
SIMON H

A university in Maine offers a course on Dylanology. I am a fan, but even I thought this was a stretch. However, I have since seen the assignments and I'm impressed. The professor knows his material, pushes his students and skilfully draws out the parallels between Dylan and modern literature. I wish I was taking the course.
PETER HYATT

A mouldy martini

Re: Not for amateurs (Intelligence, spring)
The fad of adding very little vermouth to a martini is mainly the result of bars not taking proper care of their vermouth. Fortification only increases the shelf life of the wine to about a month, if refrigerated. Unless a bar gets through a lot of vermouth, the stuff they are pouring is probably spoiled and should be thrown away.
JASON HERR

Don't mention the towels

Re: Going Green (Intelligence, spring)
Why do the British still have it in for the Germans? In his column, Robert Butler mentioned that boring story about Germans leaving their towels on chairs. They don't all do that. Generally they are polite and friendly. When speaking English, they sometimes sound impolite because the German language and culture are more direct than the English and Germans transpose these values into English when speaking.
JEAN STOCKER, WEILHEIM AN DER TECK, GERMANY

Robert Butler says being courteous "is not very complicated". But it goes completely against the philosophy of the Western world – that of the individual above all else. If someone wants something, he simply has to have it. And now the emerging world is subscribing to it as well. I shudder at the thought of another 2 billion people living like that.
ANAND NATARAJAN, HYDERABAD, INDIA

Making a meal of it

Re: Stove Notes (Intelligence, spring)
Simon Hopkinson referred, in his column on the English breakfast, to "forward planning". As opposed to backward or sideways planning? What is wrong with just "planning"? I like to think of *Intelligent Life* as an example of immaculate English.
RAY WOOLSTON, LODDON, NORFOLK

CORRECTIONS

In "Breaking bad news" (Features, spring), two errors crept in during editing. We said that Alexsis de Raadt St James, whose ideas on breaking bad news have been widely adopted, was 50 in 2001. In fact she was born in November 1956, so she is 54 now. We also misnamed the university to whose department of psychiatry she gave $2m: it is the University of California, San Francisco, not the University of California, Berkeley. And Charles Marmar is professor of psychiatry at UCSF, not Berkeley.

In "Digital Africa" (Features, spring), we misspelt Audrey Wabwire's name. Apologies to her.

HAVE YOUR SAY
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LOOK OUT FOR THE SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER ISSUE OF **INTELLIGENT LIFE**, ON SALE **AUGUST 22nd**

THIS SEASON

EXHIBITIONS

Poussin, meet Twombly

It has become a trend for big exhibitions to feature more than one artist, so they sound like arty advertising agencies – "Matisse Picasso", "Turner Whistler Monet", "Duchamp Man Ray Picabia". Mostly the artists shared techniques or palettes, schools or circles. Not so the latest combo: Twombly and Poussin.

One is an American abstract expressionist, the other a classical French painter, and three centuries separate them. The paintings of Nicolas Poussin are luxuriously detailed, with a rich Titian-like intimacy (*left*: "Rinaldo and Armida", c.1630). Cy Twombly, now 83, is bold, energetic and challenging (*below*: "Quattro Stagioni: Primavera", 1993-95). So why put them together?

Well, both moved to Rome at 30 or so, and spent most of their lives there. And Twombly did once say, "I would have liked to have been Poussin." If the curators are placing a lot of weight on that line, these two giants do have some things in common. Both are gripped by classical myth, Renaissance painting and Arcadia; both have painted the four seasons. Poussin's work is allegorical, full of intellectual rigour, while Twombly's is textual, a kind of *écriture*.

This exhibition, one of a series marking Dulwich's bicentenary, manages to find six mutual themes. Whether it answers the niggling doubts will be fascinating to see.

~ OLIVIA WEINBERG

Twombly and Poussin: Arcadian Painters
Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, June 29th to September 25th

EXHIBITIONS AT A GLANCE

The Government Art Collection (Whitechapel Gallery, London, June 3rd 2011 to September 2nd 2012). Bizarrely, this is the first public exhibition in this all-British collection's 113-year history. The political elite (Nick Clegg, Peter Mandelson et al) pick their favourites. Not for the apolitical.

54th Venice Biennale (Venice, June 4th to November 27th). Bigger and bolder than ever: 177 days, 89 countries, 82 artists (32 women), 40 collateral events. Look out for Cindy Sherman, James Turrell and Martin Creed.

Toulouse-Lautrec and Jane Avril: Beyond the Moulin Rouge (Courtauld, London, June 16th to September 18th). He was an artist, she a dancer. He was born into French nobility. She was the abused daughter of a courtesan. She was as important to him as he was to her. This show celebrates a collaboration and a long friendship.

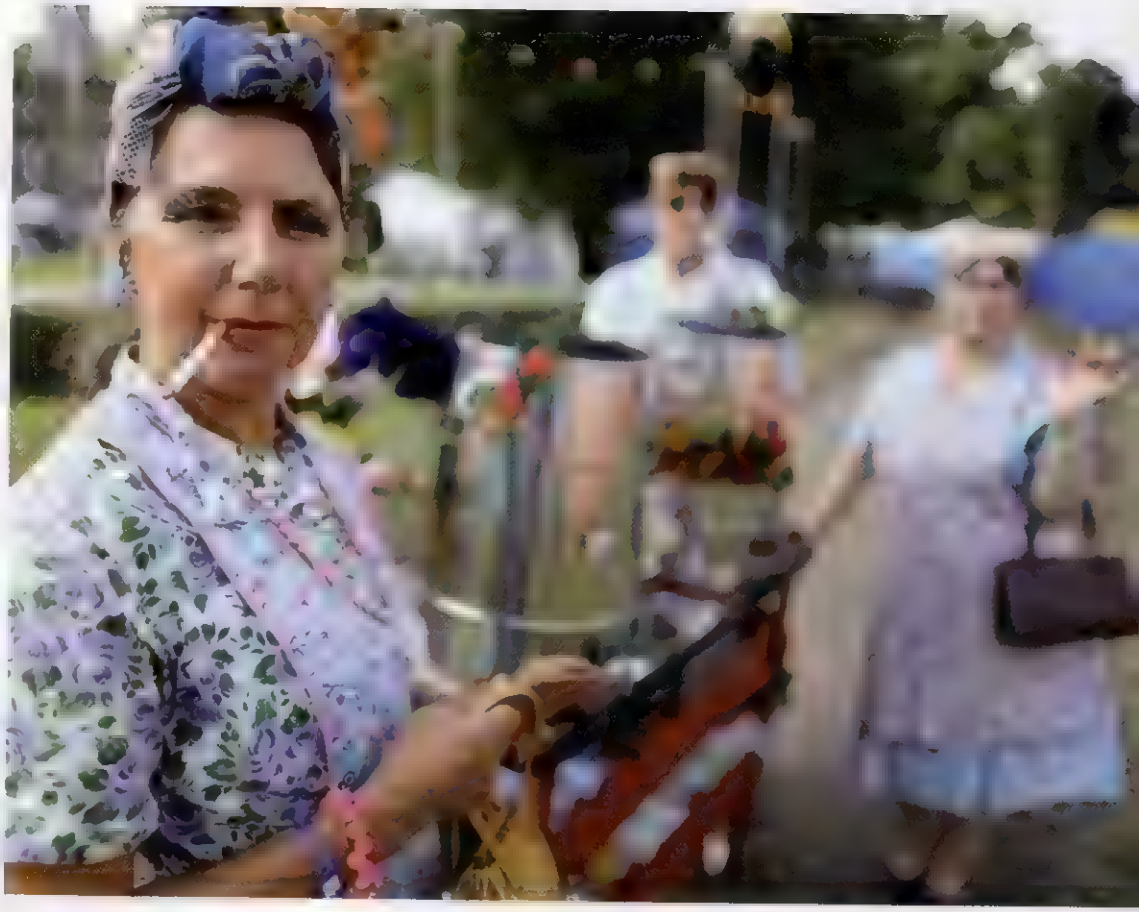
Picasso at work: Through the lens of David Douglas Duncan >

(Picasso Museum, Malaga, June 20th to September 25th). An influential photojournalist, Duncan is best known for his photos of Korea and Vietnam. But in 1956 he met Picasso, who became a close friend. This show mixes work by both.

Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity (Guggenheim, New York, June 24th to September 28th).Ufan was a key member of the Mono-ha Group (School of Things), the first Japanese avant-garde movement to make an international splash. This show wriggles its way up the Guggenheim and includes a new bespoke installation. Artist, philosopher and poet, Ufan offers three for the price of one.

René Magritte: The Pleasure Principle (Tate Liverpool, June 24th to October 16th). Magritte was more concerned with representation and meaning than the act of painting itself. This exhibition goes beyond the man in the bowler hat. Over 60 paintings, many unseen, plus photos and home movies. "The Face of Genius" is a highlight.

Helmut Newton: White Women, Sleepless Nights, Big Nudes (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, July 3rd to September 25th). Newton's photographs are synonymous with 1970s raciness. Here, all 205 pictures from his three groundbreaking books are on show for the first time (*below*: "Villa d'Este, Lake Como, Italy", 1975). Powerful and provocative. ~ OW



ESTATE OF HELMUT NEWTON, SO - THE WEST NEWS

TALKS

Anything goes in Cornwall

With its haut-boho vibe, the Port Eliot Festival in Cornwall has become one of the arts world's most colourful gatherings. Run by the Earl and Countess of St Germans, with a medieval priory and a Humphrey Repton park as its backdrop, it finds room for wild swimming, cookery demos, a fashion zone and a flower show, alongside cultish bands like British Sea Power and performance artists such as the Tea Ladies (*above*). New this year is an outdoor cinema with Martin Scorsese choosing a double bill each night at dusk, plus a Poetry Takeaway offering "free, made-to-order" poems. Authors appearing include Edmund de Waal, A.C. Grayling, Gillian Slovo and the writers of "Peep Show", while Martin Parr holds an instant photography exhibition. "We wanted to create a place where anything goes," says Catherine St Germans, once a columnist on this magazine. "We can't offer artists a lot of money, but we can offer *carte blanche*, which is a rare thing in this day and age. We were told that to succeed a festival must be either literary or musical, but that's proved to be wrong." ~ ANTHONY GARDNER

Port Eliot Festival *July 21st to 24th www.porteliotfestival.com*

TALKS AT A GLANCE

Alan Bennett (Lyttelton, London, June 13th). Wash your ears out. Britain's favourite Yorkshireman returns to the National Theatre to talk about his new book, "Smut: Two Unseemly Stories".

Etonnants Voyageurs (St Malo, June 11th to 13th). The French travel-writing festival looks at supercities. With Alexander McCall Smith, Alice Albinia and a dozen Haitian writers.

Buxton Festival (July 9th to 27th). Opera is its main focus, but this Derbyshire festival has a fine supporting cast of writers. Colin Thubron, Esther Freud and Salley Vickers should all be on song.

Queen's Park Book Festival (June 11th). London's newest, and shortest, lit-fest mixes locals – Maggie Gee, Tim Lott – with outsiders such as Sebastian Faulks and Philip Hensher. ~ AG

THEATRE

Saluting Mr Verbatim

Trying to define a theatre's policy is usually like nailing jam to a wall, but the Tricycle's aim in life is clear: it is to turn punters into citizens. Its course was set 27 years ago with the arrival of its artistic director Nicolas Kent (*below*), one of theatre's unsung heroes, forfeiting celebrity by sticking to a chosen path. The son of a German-Jewish button merchant, Kent was onto colour-blind casting as a Cambridge undergraduate, and put on his first verbatim text at the Oxford Playhouse in the 1970s – a legally risky staging of the "Romans in Britain" obscenity trial. Also at Oxford, he directed "Playboy of the West Indies", Mustapha Matura's Trinidadian reworking of J.M. Synge's comedy, which became an early success at the Tricycle, together with "The Great White Hope", Howard Sackler's tragic portrait of the heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. With such plays, and others by James Baldwin and August Wilson, Kent put down local-international roots – the two being synonymous in Kilburn with its Irish, black and Asian communities. Then came "Half the Picture" (1994), Richard Norton-Taylor's revelatory transcript of the inquiry into Britain's arms-to-Iraq scandal. It set the style for the Tricycle's tribunal plays, which capitalise on naturalism's great discovery that if you put a frame round the routines of ordinary existence – from baking a cake to grilling a shifty politician – they spring to dramatic life. This led to studies of Nuremberg, Srebrenica, Bloody Sunday and Guantánamo, and a 12-play cycle of Afghan history, "The Great Game", which recently played to a Pentagon audience – making a double with "Half the Picture", once staged at the Houses of Parliament. Kent's eighth tribunal play, "Tactical Questioning", examines the death in British custody of the suspected Iraqi insurgent Baha Mousa. On past form, it will take the theatre to places cameras cannot go, and tell more of the truth than you will find in the papers. ~ IRVING WARDLE

Tactical Questioning Tricycle, London NW6 from June 2nd

THEATRE AT A GLANCE

A Thousand and One Nights (Canadian Opera Company, Toronto, June 11th to 19th; Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh, August 21st to September 3rd). A new, two-part adaptation of ancient Persia's great compendium of story-telling, by the novelist Hanan al-Shaykh, gets the Tim Supple treatment: multicultural casting, kaleidoscopic vibrancy, song and dance, and a hefty dose of sex and violence.

Masterclass (Samuel J. Friedman, New York, from June 14th). A revival for Terrence McNally's homage to Callas, with Tyne Daly as the diva condescending to teach three young performers. Expect a rollercoaster: ageing divas make great subjects for theatre (think of the recent "End of the Rainbow", stuffed with the neuroses of Judy Garland) and Daly, though physically small, can swallow audiences whole.

Road Show (Menier Chocolate Factory, London, June 24th to September 17th). Almost a new Sondheim: this short, sharp musical satire on entrepreneurial America has had several names, and versions, since its debut as "Wise Guys" in 1999. With John Doyle directing, it is in safe hands.

Lullaby (Barbican Pit, London, June 24th to July 24th). Both the Barbican and the cabaret-theatre company Duckie survived the recent killing fields of Arts Council cuts, and thank goodness. Who else would dream up a night's entertainment (and it does last all night) that sends its audience to sleep? Pack pyjamas and a sense of humour.

The Tempest (Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, August 27th to October 29th). Trevor Nunn is on a roll: after luring the crowds back to Rattigan with Sienna Miller in "Flare Path", and reuniting two History Boys in "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern", he gets Ralph Fiennes to pick up Prospero's magic books. Sure to be intense. ~ ISABEL LLOYD

FILM

Harry Potter and the film PhD

Future generations of film historians should adore the Harry Potter series. Featuring the same core cast in the same few settings, the eight movies provide an unrivalled chance to play compare-and-contrast. In essence, episodes two to eight are all remakes of "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" (2001). Students of digital effects will be able to note how those house elves were a little more lifelike on every outing. Trainee fashion gurus can catalogue a decade of adjustments to Harry's school uniform, while proponents of the auteur theory can measure the impact of four different directors on almost identical material.

In the first two films, Chris Columbus established the series' systematic, scene-by-scene method of transferring J.K. Rowling's novels to celluloid. This resulted in a lot of bladder-testing running times, but satisfied young fans who demanded to see every one of their favourite moments on screen. Columbus was also wise enough to hire some light-fingered scene-stealers: Maggie Smith and Alan Rickman more than compensate for the stilted central trio. Alfonso Cuaron took over for "The Prisoner of Azkaban" (2004) and conjured up the misty, magical atmosphere that Columbus's films had lacked. Mike Newell, Harry's first British director, focused on character and performances in "The Goblet of Fire" (2005): Harry and Ron are as tongue-tied with the opposite sex as their older counterparts in Newell's "Four Weddings and a Funeral". David Yates directed the last four films, making dark epics which were largely incomprehensible to anyone who hadn't memorised the books in advance. This summer's "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2" marks the end of the series, but the PhD proposals have only just begun. ~ NICHOLAS BARBER

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 British release ..., 15th

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FILM AT A GLANCE

The Beaver (June 17th). Jodie Foster directs Mel Gibson: will audiences come to bury or to praise him? And now that we've heard his racist and misogynist rants, are we more or less likely to accept him as a man who talks through a glove puppet?

Incendies (June 24th). Oscar-nominated fable about the long-term effect of a Middle Eastern war on a Canadian family. It's tough going, but stay with it for the gut-punching twist.

Green Lantern (June 17th). Martin Campbell, who revived the Bond films not once but twice ("Goldeneye", "Casino Royale") brings DC Comics' intergalactic superhero to the big screen, with Ryan Reynolds in the computer-generated leotard.

Life in a Day (June 17th). A good bet for a Best Documentary Oscar: a montage of thousands of clips which were sent to Kevin Macdonald ("Touching the Void") from around the globe, each of them shot on July 24th 2010. All human life is here – plus a newborn giraffe.

Bridesmaids (June 24th). Judd "Knocked Up" Apatow may have produced this wedding comedy, but for once it's about women rather than man-children. Kristen Wiig, whose sly cameos have lit up many a film, is the star and co-writer.

Beginners (July 22nd, *left*). Ewan McGregor learns that his aged dad, Christopher Plummer, has a) cancer, and b) a boyfriend Mike Mills's bohemian romantic drama is based on his own family.

The Devil's Double (August 12th). Dominic Cooper proves that he's not just that nice boy from "Tamara Drewe" and "Mamma Mia" by triumphing in the dual role of Saddam Hussein's psychopathic son, Uday, and the Iraqi officer who is forced to be his body double.

Cowboys and Aliens (August 12th). Well, why shouldn't aliens land in 19th-century Arizona? It can't live up to its pitch – "Unforgiven" with bug-eyed monsters – but the cast (Harrison Ford, Daniel Craig, Paul Dano) and director (Jon Favreau) are high-calibre. ~ NB

ROCK

These boots are made for dancing

Summer means festivals, and Britain does them very well. **Glastonbury** (Somerset, June 24th to 26th) is still the big one, and it is taking a break next year, so all the more reason to follow it on the BBC. It has hefty headliners – U2, Coldplay and Beyoncé *(below)*, plus the headline-worthy Elbow – supported by the usual cornucopia. This may be the first bill to embrace Paul Simon and Big Boi, Robyn Hitchcock and Robyn the Swedish Madonna, plus Jimmy Cliff and Rastamouse. **Latitude** (Suffolk, July 15th to 17th) has less wattage – headliners are the brooding The National, the likeable Paolo Nutini and the flimsy Suede – but its lower ranks are teeming with talent. Look out for theatrical pop from Anna Calvi, warm soul from The Duke & The King, and many distinguished authors, all struggling to find the right outfit. **The Big Chill** (Herefordshire, August 4th to 7th) always has a warm atmosphere, and continues to reinvent itself with hip-hop from Kanye West, dance-pop from Jessie J, and roots rock from Robert Plant. To the purist, city festivals don't count – no wellies, no tents – but **Hyde Park**, London, has acres of enticing names, including the Killers (June 24th), Arcade Fire and Mumford & Sons (June 30th), the Black Eyed Peas and Tinie Tempah (July 1st), and Pulp, Grace Jones and TV On The Radio (July 3rd). Eclectic, but effective. – TIM DE LISLE

For this year's festival authors, see page 107

REX

ROCK AT A GLANCE

The Pierces (British tour, June 7th to 16th). Two sisters from Alabama, via New York, who have a deliciously catchy new album. If Abba had made country music, it might have sounded like this.

Take That (British tour, May 27th to July 9th; European tour, July 12th to 29th). Back for good? So it seems. But Robbie Williams may be less likely to stay the course. And the other four will face a dilemma on this record-breaking stadium tour: should they let him sing his solo hits, which are louder, lairier and more grandstanding than their own cardigan-clad pop? They've got one thing right, roping in a high-class support act: the Pet Shop Boys.

Manchester International Festival (June 30th to July 17th). The third edition of a biennial festival which made a scintillating debut in 2007 and kept it up in 2009. Its aim is originality and its strengths are rock and theatre, often combined. Bjork unveils a show called "Biophilia", which will stretch the definition of multimedia to include apps. Damon Albarn, the pop polymath and Manchester regular, premieres "Doctor Dee", a rock opera about an Elizabethan spy and alchemist, directed by Rufus Norris. Victoria Wood writes a play, Robert Wilson directs Willem Dafoe, and the blind singers Amadou & Mariam give a concert in the dark. Unmissable.

Glee Live! In Concert! (American tour, May 21st to June 18th; British and Irish tour, June 22nd to July 3rd). Yes, the TV show is cheesy, but at a time when the telly is short of music, it is acting as a handy history lesson for a generation, introducing them to some great songs from the past 50 years. In concert, it could go either way. One of those screamers should really be a question mark. – TDL

CLASSICAL AT A GLANCE

BBC Proms (Royal Albert Hall etc, London, July 15th to September 10th). The world's premier music festival is well up to snuff this year. Don't miss the pianists Martha Argerich, Andras Schiff and Benjamin Grosvenor (only 19, and appearing on the first night); the string players Yo-Yo Ma, Nigel Kennedy and Midori; full operas by Rossini and Handel, and the chamber-music strand at the intimate Cadogan Hall, which is unusually strong.

Edinburgh International Festival (August 12th to September 4th). Go for the opera, especially Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe, reimagining "Hamlet" as "The Revenge of Prince Zi Dan"; Vlaamse Opera bringing Rossini's "Semiramide"; and the Mariinsky with Strauss's "Die Frau ohne Schatten".

Daniel Barenboim (Wigmore Hall, London, June 15th). Playing works by Schubert, to whom he has come late in life, so this recital – also going to Berlin, August 23rd – should be fascinating.

Saint François d'Assise (Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich, from June 26th). A new production of Messiaen's extraordinary opera. Hermann Nitsch directs a strong cast; Kent Nagano conducts.

Placido Domingo and Angela Gheorghiu (O2, London, July 29th). Domingo (*below*) returns after a brush with colon cancer. Heavily mic'd, he won't have to exert himself, while Gheorghiu delivers the decibels. ~ MC

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Big year for a star pupil turned guru

Anne-Sophie Mutter's career as a violinist has been governed by the guru-pupil principle. In 1976, as a teenager, she was taken under the wing of Herbert von Karajan; in 1997, she created her own foundation, which nurtures brilliant young string players from all over the world. The best of the current bunch will be at the Verbier Festival (July 27th) as Mutters Virtuosi, playing both on their own and with Mutter herself. She also gives a Prom at the Albert Hall, London, on September 6th, and in the winter she will have her own mini-season at the Barbican, joining the LSO to perform works including one written for her by Sofia Gubaidulina and another by the man she calls her "in-house composer", André Previn. Which is a sweet way of saying that she was until recently the fifth Mrs Previn. Before that she had been married to a lawyer (who died of cancer) much older than herself: journalists have long feasted like vultures on her dramatic private life. Hence her hatred of press intrusiveness and her rigid control of her own publicity. But that control is constitutional, and underpins her commanding authority on stage. Her artistry, whether in Mozart and Beethoven or in the music of the contemporary composers she champions, is perfection incarnate: this youthful 48-year-old seems to live in a permanent golden age. ~ MICHAEL CHURCH

Verbier Festival *Switzerland, July 15th to 31st* ***Artist Portrait: Anne-Sophie Mutter*** *Barbican, November 27th & 30th, February 19th & 20th*

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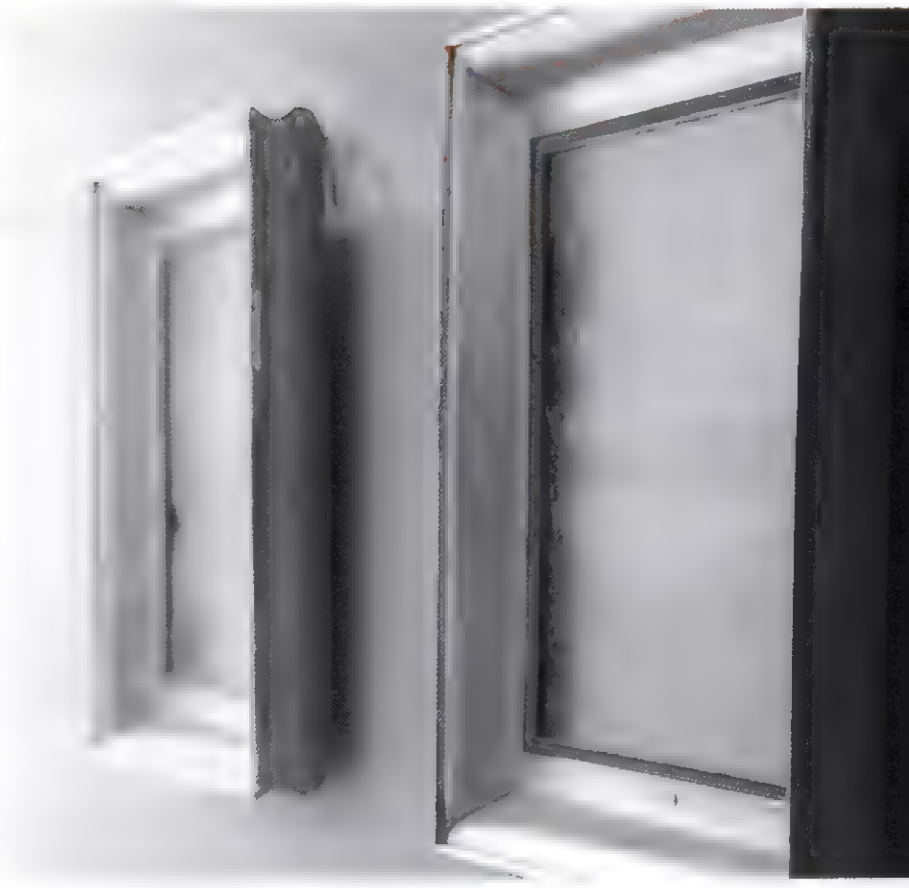

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THINKING

How, and when, to make a decision

Seemingly trivial things have a huge influence on the way that we make decisions, research shows. **Bill Ridgers** reports

YOU HAVE A big decision to make. Whether to put in an offer on a house, say, or change jobs. Which of the following will help you make the right choice: being in a state of sexual excitement or having a full bladder? Most likely, it is not something you have pondered. Psychologists, however, have long studied the ways that external factors such as these influence our decision-making.

A full bladder, apparently, helps us take more rational, long-term decisions. At least that was the finding of a study carried out by Mirjam Tuk, a professor at the University of Twente in the Netherlands. In an experiment, Tuk tested two sets of participants. The first was told to drink five cups of water; the second to take just five sips. After 40 minutes, they were tested on their decision-making abilities. Tuk says that the group who were, by now, crossing their legs, were better able to exercise self-control and hold out for larger rewards.

If true, Tuk's findings are interesting because they challenge an established psychological theory called "ego depletion". This states that we only have a finite well of self-control. Each time we deny ourselves something – whether going to the bathroom or choosing a salad for lunch, rather than the sausage sandwich we really wanted – we use up some of our reserves. The theory of ego depletion was developed by Roy Baumeister, a psychologist at Florida State University. In practical terms, he says, this means that if you have an important decision to make, you shouldn't draw from your well of self-control beforehand. Reserves, he says, can be depleted in all sorts of ways: "Even things like trying to look interested at a boring meeting, trying to pretend your boss's jokes are funny or not saying something unkind to your spouse when you are angry."

Decision-making ability can be thought of as akin to a muscle, Baumeister says, in that it is liable to be worn out with overuse. For some, this effect can be life-changing. A recent study by Israeli scientists found that judges were much more likely to grant a convict parole if they had just eaten a meal than if they were at the end of a session. At first, the scientists thought that falling sugar levels might be making the judges grumpy. But in the end they concluded that making too many decisions was tiring the poor things out. So, as a sitting wore on, they were more likely to take the easy option – in this instance returning the prisoner to chokey.

People also react in surprising ways to their physical surroundings. Josh Ackerman, a psychology professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says that a decision can be affected by something as trivial as what we are touching at the time. His research has shown that our choices can depend on whether we are holding something heavy or light. He carried out an experiment in which participants conducted mock job interviews. Sometimes the interviewers held a heavy clipboard, sometimes a light one. When holding a heavy clipboard, the interviewer was more likely to view the applicant as having gravitas. Those interviewed by someone holding a light clipboard were seen as more flaky. It seems our minds take many such physical metaphors literally. Other studies have found that sitting on a hard chair when negotiating the price of a car will make you negotiate harder, and that holding a hot cup of tea when meeting someone will make you more warmly disposed towards them than if you are holding an iced drink.

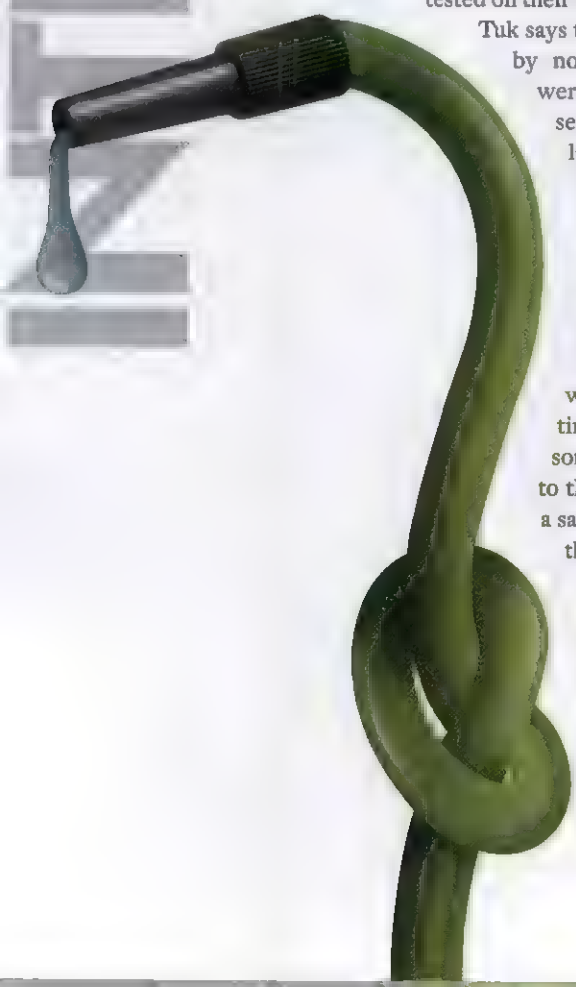


ILLUSTRATION BRETT RYDER

The reason, Ackerman believes, is that touch is the first sense that we develop after birth. "People learn how to make decisions about the world by understanding what they've already experienced, and that means the physical world." The ability to think in the abstract, of course, comes much later.

Another area of interest to the study of decision-making revolves around sleep deprivation. Professor Michael Chee, a neuroscientist at the National University of Singapore, says that most of us already realise that making decisions when we are exhausted is not advisable. Yet the effect that tiredness has on us is counter-intuitive. Chee says that we tend to believe that we become overly cautious in order to compensate. But the truth, he says, is that a lack of sleep makes us much too optimistic in our decision-making.

Chee's research has implications for those who make some of the most important decisions of all. He says that he has evidence that surgeons at the end of a long shift can become too gung-ho, attempting risky treatments in the belief that they have found a genuine shortcut. (This is also something long understood by casino operators in Las Vegas. It is one reason why they go to such lengths to keep punters at the tables until the early hours, by pumping oxygen into the gambling halls and having no windows or clocks on the walls.)

To return to the original question, being sexually aroused, alas, is not an aid to decision-making. Studies have shown that it can make us impetuous, much as you'd expect. But what is striking is that we greatly underestimate its effect. When Dan Ariely, a professor at Duke University in America, and author of "Predictably Irrational", experimented on his undergraduates, he found that they had no idea of the extent to which they were being led by their libidos. One reason, Ariely believes, is that we have only a limited mix of emotion and cognition to draw upon. Increase one and you automatically detract from the other. So Robin Williams may have been making a valid psychological point when he said: "God gave men both a penis and a brain, but unfortunately not enough blood supply to run both at the same time."

But if all our decisions are so influenced by external factors, that raises an inevitable question: to what extent are we involved in our own decision-making? Professor Ackerman believes the answer is very little: "All of these subtle influences suggest that most of what is causing our behaviour we are really not aware of. People are just very good at post-hoc reasons for their behaviour." Which means that next time you reach for that sausage sandwich, you can reasonably lay claim to the excuse that you couldn't help yourself. Unless you are desperate for the loo at the time. ■

Robert Butler *Going Green*

The way greens make their points can be irritating. They need to be more like Lieutenant Columbo

A TELEVISION PRODUCER I know says his idea of a nightmare is going to a dinner party and discovering everyone else there is an environmentalist. He's a reasonably tolerant guy, but something about greens – even going-greens – gives him "the pip".

It could be the way we go on and on, and tend to make our points in terms of statistics, results and conclusions. "Every second we lose an area of rainforest the size of two football fields." "We have only 70 months to avoid catastrophic climate change." On Twitter, NGOs have raised the delivery of bad news to a new level of concision. The trouble is, these tidbits of information close the subject down and don't allow the other person's mind anywhere to go. Whereas the imagination – as any dramatist knows – is drawn more towards movement and hints. We are almost involuntarily attracted to the half-hidden, the shadowy and incomplete.

What we need to do is abandon the "information deficit" model. That's the one that goes: I know something, you don't know it, once you know what I know you will grasp the seriousness of the situation and change your behaviour accordingly. Greens should dump that model in favour of suggesting details that actually catch people's interest and allow the other person to get involved.

The person greens could learn the most from is Shakespeare. The key lesson that he teaches us is that it is the other person who completes the thought. His plays take place in the mind of the audience. The Battle of Agincourt doesn't happen in any convincing way on stage. At the start of "Henry V", Shakespeare has to ask the audience to do the legwork:

> Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
> Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.

His plays were originally performed in daylight with no scenery. Towards the end of the first scene of "Hamlet", which takes place on the battlements at night-time, Horatio sees that dawn is breaking:

> But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

Horatio comes up with this knockout line because there's no lighting effect to do it for him; there's nothing for the audience to hang on to other than the image. But the more dots that people are able to join up themselves, the more they see that dawn in their mind's eye, the more powerful the experience is. The skill is knowing which are the right dots and how far apart you can space them.

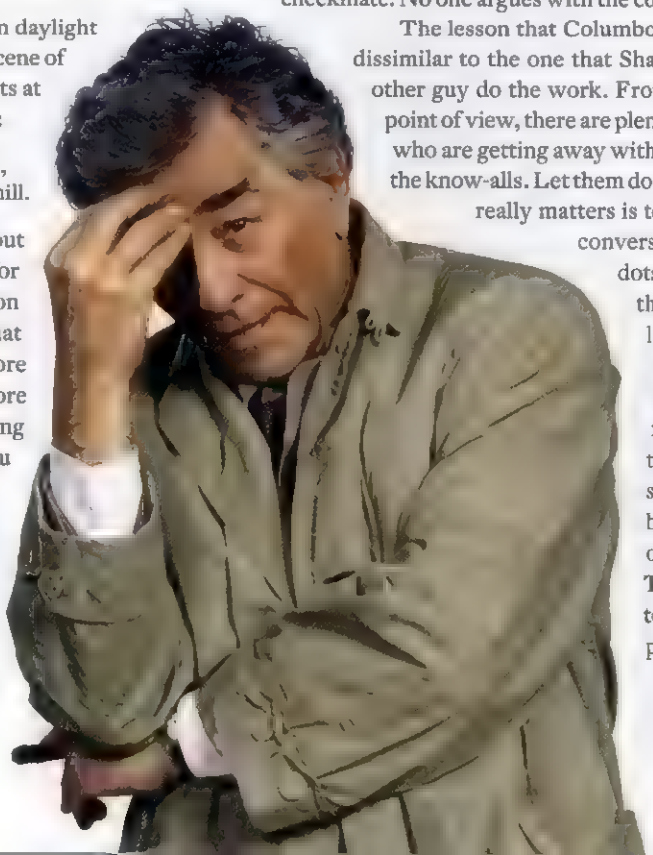
If there's a role model for this approach, of drawing the other person into the conversation so that you find that you are sharing the same thoughts, then it's the *eiron*, the stock character in ancient Greek comedy whose job is to expose the pride and folly of other characters. The *eiron* – from whom we get the word irony – does this by feigning puzzlement and slow-wittedness, which readily invites condescension from other stock characters, notably the irascible father and the bombastic soldier, and, in the process, he shows them the stupidity of their actions.

A modern-day version of the *eiron* is the 1970s television detective Lieutenant Frank Columbo. An episode of "Columbo" is an example of the "inverted detective story": the first quarter of an hour is spent watching the crime and the cover-up. Only then does Columbo shamble on, in his rumpled raincoat, one hand cupped over his eyebrow, looking for a light for his cigar. His job is to work out what the audience already knows.

A working-class Italian-American, Columbo expresses no resentment at the fact that his suspects often come from a very different walk of life. He finds their fancy homes, yachts, art collections and ambitious building projects "very impressive". He has simply slipped in to see them while the front door was open because he's very interested to hear what people have to say about the situation. This is not an approach that's often attributed to environmentalists.

It's a kind of jujitsu. Columbo shares what he's thinking with the very people who hope to outwit him ("You know there's something that's been bugging me...I couldn't get to sleep thinking about this") and he always seeks their advice ("Well, there is something you could help me with"). He doesn't carry a gun or use physical force; his only tools are modesty, logic and observation. He's dealing with sophisticated people who believe they can get away with murder. At the denouement, the capitulations are always graceful; there are no fights, no car chases – it's more like checkmate. No one argues with the conclusion.

The lesson that Columbo has for greens is not dissimilar to the one that Shakespeare has: let the other guy do the work. From the environmental point of view, there are plenty of people out there who are getting away with murder. Let them be the know-alls. Let them do the explaining. What really matters is to draw them into the conversation – suggest the dots and wonder at how they might possibly link up. When environmentalists go to dinner parties, they may need to keep their raincoats on, shuffle in from the bathroom and cup one hand over a brow. They may even need to speak in iambic pentameters. ■



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Tim Atkin *The Wine-List Inspector*

In Florence, a good drink is hard to find – until you discover a former wine bar with junk-shop decor

"WHERE ARE THE Botticellis? We're double-parked!" I still smile at the memory of a tourist I overheard in the Uffizi gallery, berating a hapless attendant as he tried to cover Florence's Renaissance gems. There's so much good art and architecture to see that you'd struggle to visit everything in a month, even if you sprinted between the churches, piazzas and museums.

Very few people go to Florence to eat and drink, at least not in the way that they go to Milan or Rome. This great Tuscan city is not as dull as Venice in terms of gastronomy, but – with the exception of the swish, but extremely pricey Enoteca Pinchiorri – the food is underwhelming. The same, alas, goes for much of the wine. Despite its proximity to the vineyards of Chianti, Montalcino and Montepulciano, Florence doesn't have an abundance of good lists. In such lacklustre company, one restaurant really stands out. Ristorante Enoteca Pane e Vino, run by the winningly eccentric Pierazzuoli brothers, was Florence's first wine bar, and has been serving reasonably priced vino for 30 years from premises on a small square close to the Arno. Crucially for tourists, it's only five minutes' stroll from the Ponte Vecchio.

You would not, it must be said, come here for the decor, which combines ill-sited pot plants with assorted junk-shop furniture. But elegance is one thing you won't have gone short on before you get here. Pane e Vino is all about atmosphere. On the night I visited (it's only open for dinner), it was full of raucous Italians and a handful of foreigners, all of them drinking wine.

The restaurant remains true to its origins as a wine bar, originally a necessity because it only had a licence to serve nibbles. The food is better now, but is nothing like as exciting as the wine list, which runs to more than 1,000 bins. If that sounds like a lot for a small restaurant, the choice is made easier for you by Gilberto and Ubaldo Pierazzuoli, who feature 250 wines from their cellar each week.

In one sense, the list is irrelevant. Gilberto likes to recommend wines that aren't part of that week's selection, if he thinks you'll enjoy them. This approach is a bit chaotic – and would drive some people bonkers – but it's appropriately Italian. "The people we buy wines from are friends," Ubaldo told me, "and we like to share them."

Even in shortened form, the printed list is impressive. It's divided by colour and (mostly) Italian region, rather than by style, with the occasional interloper from other countries. All of the major Italian *denominazioni* are represented, and many of the minor ones too. It's good to see a restaurant in Tuscany featuring wines from Sicily, Sardinia, Lazio, Campania and the Basilicata as well as top-end names from Champagne, Alsace, the Rhône and Bordeaux. Spain, Chile, Hungary, New Zealand, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia and America also make an appearance, completing one of the most cosmopolitan line-ups in Italy.

There are only 15 wines by the glass, all of them Italian, but the brothers seem happy to open and pour just about anything. At times you get the impression that they're making the prices up on the spot, but they are nonetheless incredibly reasonable. There's a good turnover, too, so samples are fresh.

My friend and I decided to stick with the by-the-glass selection. We kicked off with a flute of the fruity, youthful, Pinot Noir-based house Champagne (Le Clochard from A. Daméry) and one of a creamy, zesty Italian fizz called 2007 Cesarini Sforza Le Millesime. With our starters (pasta, and a broad bean and chicory soup), Gilberto recommended a light, citrus and green olive-scented 2009 Vermentino di Sardegna, Cala delle Farfelle, Isoni – and (more interestingly) a savoury, lightly oaked Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon blend: 2009 Podere Sassaie Petreto.

The pleasure didn't end there. With our mains (suckling pig and beef), we drank a Supertuscan blend of Sangiovese, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon (the 2007 Falsari Altrove at €30). This is an elegant biodynamic red from a small producer, with subtle strawberry and blackcurrant fruit flavours and none of the oak-swamped extraction that Supertuscans are prone to.

Best of all, instead of a dessert we finished the meal with two glasses of the grapey, zesty, super-fresh 2010 Moscato d'Asti, Paulo Saracco from Piedmont. It's the kind of wine that makes you want to sit and chat rather than dash off to another museum. For a few, memorable moments, the Botticellis can wait. ■

Ristorante Enoteca Pane e Vino Piazza Cestello 3R, Florence +39 055 247 6956, www.ristorantepaneevino.it

In the bin

Number of wines 1,000 (although only 250 at any one time)
By the glass 15
Under €30 110
Over €100 35
Best value 2007 Pieropan Soave Classico Superiore, Calvarino (€24)
Worst value 2004 Dal Forno Valpolicella Superiore, Monte Lodoletta (€120)
Gluggability ◆◆◆◆◆
Expense account adjuster* ◆◆◆◆◆
Chianti Classico index** 1.64

* Probability that the next-door table are paying with the company's money
** 2007 Fontodi Chianti Classico is €22 here, €13.39 at Casa del Vino

PHOTOGRAPH CHIARA GOIA

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FOOD

The taste of al fresco

Does food really have more flavour if you eat it in the open air, or does it just feel that way? **Annalisa Barbieri** packs a test tube in her picnic basket to explore the science of eating outdoors

THE DREAM AND the reality are never so divorced as when dining al fresco. As soon as someone says "let's eat outdoors", the spirits lift. The imagination fires and we picture something cold and fizzy to drink, pressed gingham napkins, vibrant salads, excellent bread that tears easily without turning into cotton wool, a flavourful Scotch egg, and platefuls of berries at that perfect stage between ripe and ruin. The sun is shining, but the table is in the shade. Nature serenades, but she does not intrude.

The reality, all too often, is that the food is average, you are too hot or too cold, there's a bug in your drink, and you are one big bodily tic as you attempt to avoid the wasps and ants.

People in northern Europe tend to assume that in the Mediterranean everyone eats outside, dunking bullets of bread in olive oil – the men in vests like something out of a Dolce & Gabbana ad, the women all like Monica Bellucci, a plate-throw away from a sexy tantrum. I am Italian, and it is not so. We might eat outside occasionally, but mostly we consume all that nice food in the kitchen, staying firmly out of the sun, with the breeze blowing through the multicoloured ribbons of the fly curtains.

Putting salad dressing in the sun works a treat, as long as the breeze doesn't blow away the volatiles

Things happen to food in the warmth of the sun. If you've ever made ice cream, you'll know it tastes more intense just before it's frozen completely. This is because sucrose changes at molecular level when heated, which makes it seem sweeter: from fridge-cold to body temperature, it can taste almost half as sweet again. Heat also increases the concentration of volatiles – gaseous molecules given off by food that are responsible for its aroma – and their smell plays a vital role in our enjoyment of eating. We actually get two hits of smell: one through the nose, or orthonasally, the other retronasally, when the molecules from the food we're chewing go up the nose from the back of the throat. (This is why it's a myth that you can't taste if your nose is blocked: you can, although the experience will be blunted.) Thus the chef Peter Gordon, in his book "Salads", recommends putting salad dressing in the sun for a few minutes to optimise the flavours: it works a treat, as long as the breeze isn't so fierce as to blow away the volatiles.

But unlike animals, who rely almost exclusively on their olfactory system, we expect food to appeal to our somatosensory system – touch, temperature, pain receptors (nothing spiny or too hot) and vision. And primal triggers affect us. As a species, we love a fire; it taps into something deep within us, signalling protection, warmth, the ability to cook. Picture a piece of boiled chicken, and then the same piece char-grilled on a barbecue: most of us prefer our meat with caramelised stripes.

But does all this actually make food taste better outside? "It depends on previous experiences," says Linda Bartoshuk, director of the Human Research Centre for Taste and Smell at the University of Florida. "It wouldn't be the same for everyone. The major effects are going to be cognitive: what seems exotic to you, what your childhood experiences are."

Childhood does play a part, since eating outside – or at least the idea of it – seems to bring out the child in us: it feels more playful, less formal and fussy, more exciting. At the Fat Duck in Berkshire, Heston Blumenthal gets diners to listen to an iPod playing recordings of crashing waves and seagulls while they eat his shellfish dish Sound of the Sea; in recipes, he has suggested spraying pickled onion juice from an atomiser when serving fish and chips. Perhaps this is the best combination: getting a whiff of the outdoors, while staying safely inside. Maybe we should eat our picnics at home, looking out of an open window.

While barbecues and picnics are largely for weekends, many of us now get the chance to eat outside every day, by going to a café. Pavement tables, like balconies, have become far more prevalent in the past decade; even Britain, with its damp climate, now has a few tables on every shopping street, and they are not just popular with smokers. In any block of flats, there seems to be at least one balcony where the owners

have crammed in a barbecue, a table and two chairs, ever optimistic. But will they be rewarded? Will their food taste better eaten on that table, on that hopeful scrap of outdoors?

Bee Wilson, the food historian and columnist, points out that many people still don't eat outside more than occasionally. "Therefore food tastes better when they do, because they feel liberated from the constraints of a table. For most of human history the majority of people have eaten outside not through choice – a jolly Enid Blyton picnic – but because they had to. Agricultural workers have always carried their lunch to the fields. And I wonder if their food tasted better to them than it would have done under the comfort of a roof."

Nonetheless, you can't deny we appreciate certain foods more fully outside: a cool ice-lolly on a hot day, or a hot soup on Bonfire Night make us stupidly grateful. We remember it, and look forward to the next time. "I think food tastes the same whether eaten inside or out," says Herbert L. Meiselman, an American scientist who has spent much of his career with the Department of Defence Food Research programme, exploring how people choose food. "But I think your appreciation of it is different. It's about expectation – eating outdoors is idealised – and anticipation. For example, someone going to a fancy restaurant expects to enjoy their dinner, so they probably will enjoy it."

If our experience of eating outside is coloured by all these things – smell, anticipation, context, childhood memories, even gratitude – whether or not it really tastes better ends up being subjective. And the truth is that although the prospect of an outdoor feast is clearly part of the fun, eating outside works best impromptu: you come across good food, which you just happen to eat outside. The best food I've ever eaten was all eaten indoors. But some of the best experiences I've ever had eating were outdoors. ■

Splendour on the grass
Much like Manet's "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe", Lee Miller's photograph of Paul Eluard, Man Ray and friends at a picnic near Cannes in 1937 emphasises the transgressive nature of eating outdoors. And it may have actually made their lunch taste better

PHOTOGRAPH LEE MILLER

FOOD: STOVE NOTES

Paella for perfectionists

Shellfish, peas, chicken, rabbit...it ain't what you add, it's the way that you add it. **Simon Hopkinson** sets out his rules for a dish his father loved

THE FIRST TIME I ate paella was on a Costa Brava campsite in the early 1960s, when I was nine. We were hard by the Mediterranean, so it featured mussels, prawns and squid, as well as pieces of chicken. There were some vegetables, too: I definitely remember peas scattered among the fragrant yellow rice. How I loved the taste! My father enjoyed it, too, so much so that he took home a paella pan large enough to feed all four of us. He used it regularly, with much pride, and it became his Saturday-night party dish.

Depending on the season, a paella may include any of the following, though not necessarily all at the same time: rice, obviously; saffron; powdered pimentón; chopped chorizo; some poultry or rabbit; shellfish and/or clams and mussels; snails; squid; garlic; chicken stock or water; fino sherry; a green vegetable such as peas or thinly cut runner beans; cooked beans such as haricots or chickpeas; chopped tomatoes; and sliced red peppers from a jar or tin – Spanish piquillo peppers are my favourite. I have rarely seen a recipe for paella that includes onions, which I think is rather good news; to start a savoury dish with no chopped onion makes a pleasant change.

Paella is, in essence, all about the rice. And the right rice, too: bomba, a tight, slightly rounded medium-short grain, similar in shape to what the British call "pudding" rice, but able to soak up about three times its weight in liquid without losing its firmness. Rice pudding and paella have some similarities: both cook via a combination of absorption and evaporation. And though a paella is – unlike rice pud – never cooked in the oven, once put together they are both happy to tootle away undisturbed until ready.

And this is the vital point: after the rice has been added to the pan and stirred in, it mustn't be moved again. In paella, the rice grains are meant to stay separated and intact. The more you fiddle about while it's cooking, the more the rice will release its starch, and the more soupy and glutinous the final texture. Constant stirring also reduces the chance of rice at the bottom catching on the hot pan, making the much-loved burnt bits known as "socarrat" by paella aficionados. As the rice is almost always one of the last items to be added, this hands-off policy shouldn't be too hard to enforce, even when adding the shellfish: you only need to pop the clams, mussels, prawns or whatever just beneath the surface of the paella when the dish is still a touch sloppy. But more about that later.

So, here's the way I have always made it. For a paella that will feed about six people, start by heating around two tablespoons of good (but not too expensive) virgin olive oil per person in a paella pan. Chop some chorizo and fry it in the oil until it's browned, then remove it and allow smallish pieces of seasoned chicken, or rabbit legs, to fry in the chorizo-flavoured oil until golden – you're looking for a total weight of meat hovering around the 1kg mark. Then add about half that weight in sliced green beans, shelled peas or a mixture of both, and tip in some roughly chopped, skinned tomatoes together with a small handful of crushed and chopped garlic cloves. This should simmer quietly for about 25 minutes, until the chicken or rabbit is almost cooked through.

At this point, pour in a litre and a half of hot chicken stock or water, together with a scattering of saffron stamens steeped in a couple of generous glugs of warmed sherry. Bring everything up to a healthy simmer and then thoroughly stir in about 500g of rice. Do not stir again, but leave to cook quietly for 20 minutes, then scatter the surface with mussels or small clams and cover with a loose, large lid or foil. Turn the heat down very low for five minutes, to allow the mussels or clams to steam open. Once they're gaping, turn off the heat and cover with a tea towel; this helps the final swelling of the rice and will also absorb excess steam. Serve immediately, scraping the pan as you go to lift off those delicious clusters of scorched rice. Far from being the bottom of the barrel, they are the best bit. ■

SHOPPING LIST

Paella pan Shallower than a frying pan, with a handle on each side. Should have a dimpled base, like the surface of a golf ball, to help the liquid trickle beneath the rice and steam it from below. Garcima s.l. is the brand favoured by Spaniards.

Bomba rice The tiny bomba rice crop produced by the village of Calasparra in south-eastern Spain is the one to buy. Irrigated via a system installed by the Romans, it ensures a continuous flow of fresh mountain water to the paddies.

Saffron Each yolky strand of saffron is the stigma of a crocus that has been harvested by hand, hence the hefty prices. The grade (determined by how well it stains) is more important than the producer. Look for "coupe", the highest grade, or "mancha", the next best.

Piquillo peppers These are indigenous to Spain, with an intense, smoky flavour. Look for DOP (Denominación de Origen Protegida) piquillos; those from Navarrico are particularly good.

Chorizo Essentially a pork sausage that contains paprika. The best for paella is a cooking chorizo. Brindisa (www.brindisa.com) has a decent one, or, if you can find it, try the chorizo produced by Embutidos Alejandro in Spain.

~ KASSIA ST CLAIR

ILLUSTRATION CATH RILEY

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CARS

They trash cars, don't they?

Behind closed doors at a proving ground, a new car may find itself ageing ten years in 20 weeks. **Paul Markillie** goes along for the ride

WE COMPLAIN ABOUT the state of the roads, and this one is making my teeth rattle. The car is only going about 30mph but the wheels are frantically drumming up and down over uneven cobblestones. "It is a tough one for vehicle integrity," says Miguel Fragoso, using engineer-speak to describe a road capable of shaking a car to bits. Yet this piece of road will never be resurfaced, because Fragoso likes it just the way it is.

He is managing director of the Millbrook Proving Ground, a sprawling 700-acre site hidden away in Bedfordshire behind security fences and high embankments. This is to prevent the car-world paparazzi snatching pictures of the new models manufacturers bring to test here. Even the lens on my mobile phone has been covered with a tamper-proof security seal. Not that the cars here look pretty. Many have not been washed for weeks and are covered in layers of dirt and dust. That too is deliberate.

Millbrook is a sort of automotive time machine. A shiny new model arrives, and after about 20 weeks it will have been exposed to the equivalent of ten years of severe weather and wear-and-tear comparable to being driven 160,000 miles or so – the lifetime of a typical car. Day and night it will have been driven fast and slowly, up and down hills, around twisty corners, through salt-water baths to accelerate rusting and along gravel roads to pit the paintwork. It will also be frozen, baked, soaked in water to reveal leaks, and bounced along the notorious Belgian Pavé, the one-mile circuit we are on. This is built from blocks of paving with rough sections and random depressions. The pounding it gives the suspension is so severe that >

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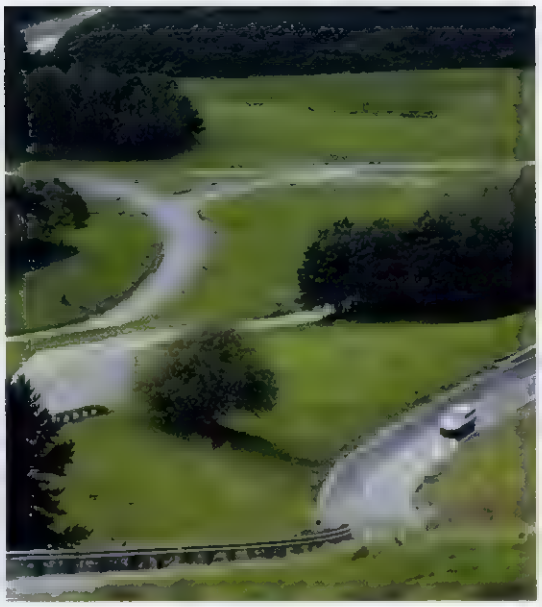

> after about five laps a car needs to be driven into a trough of water to cool its dampers down.

Carmakers also test future models on public roads, often disguised with stick-on panels, and take them to harsh environments, including roads within the Arctic Circle and deserts such as the Mojave in California. But proving grounds like Millbrook allow a lot of tests to be done in one place and in repeatable, carefully measured conditions – including the ultimate wrecking exercise: strapping in dummies and smashing the car into a steel wall to establish its crashworthiness.

During the accelerated ageing, engineers take the cars apart and examine them for worn and broken parts. This allows carmakers to tweak designs and change production methods to prevent failures which would be costly for them to fix under warranty, and embarrassing if vehicles have to be recalled. Such testing processes have helped carmakers to raise their quality, resulting in warranties getting longer. Some engine guarantees have gone from three to five years and more; anti-corrosion warranties now sometimes extend beyond ten years.

The engineers are not just looking for wear and tear. Among the most irritating problems for motorists are noise, vibration and harshness, known as NVH in the business. Shaking things up on the Belgian Pavé is one way of testing NVH, but there are others. Cars undergo extreme temperature variations, for instance. Jump in a car on a freezing morning and the temperature could be -10°C. Five minutes later, with the heater blasting away, the temperature of the dashboard could have soared to 30°C. As different materials expand at different rates when heated, this can cause niggling rattles to occur. Carmakers do not want their precious models to gain a reputation for rattling every time the heater is turned on.

Nor would they like them to be known for sloppy handling. So setting up the suspension and steering to cope with different surfaces is also a big part of the job. One of the most demanding courses on which to test vehicle dynamics is Millbrook's picturesque hill route. It swoops up and down hills and around tight corners, just like an Alpine road. It is so realistic that film-makers use it; when James Bond needed somewhere to flip his Aston Martin over seven times in "Casino Royale", this was where Daniel Craig and his stunt doubles headed.

At other times the 60 or so drivers working at Millbrook need to test a car as if on a very long straight road. This is provided by a high-speed circuit built in the 1960s when General Motors began developing the centre, which is now run as an independent company. The high-speed circuit is a two-mile, five-lane circular road that is banked. I have driven around here before, as occasionally manufacturers bring people to Millbrook to test their cars. But I never really understood the physics involved. Being banked and circular, each lane has what is called a neutral-steer speed at which the forces acting on the car are the same as if it is going in a straight line. So, as Miguel demonstrated in lane four with its neutral-steer speed of 75mph, it is possible to take your hands off the steering wheel. Accelerate harder, and the car moves on its own up into lane five, where the neutral-steer speed is 100mph. This track allows the miles to be piled on a car but with a constant force acting on the suspension. So, for instance, if you wanted to drive 500 miles at 100mph in a straight line – which is impossible on any public road, anywhere – you would just need to do 250 laps of this circuit. The track is used for testing things like durability and engine cooling.

The straightest road at Millbrook is a mile long and level to within a fraction of an inch. It is used to test acceleration and braking times. There are other courses designed to represent different road surfaces, with nasty obstacles like steep kerbstones and some of the meanest pot-holes I have ever seen. One of the reasons for driving into obstacles like this is to check that the impact does not accidentally trigger an airbag.

My interest, however, is captured by the menacing off-road course where signs warn of hazards like "Mortar Holes" and "The Sandpit". We swap Miguel's car for an old Schwarzenegger favourite, the civilian version of the Hummer. I've always reckoned this is a bit of a softy compared with a sturdy Land Rover Defender. But when Martin Newbery, a driving instructor at Millbrook, takes the wheel and plunges us through muddy, slippery, deeply rutted tracks with near-vertical hills, steep descents and water-filled pits, he starts to change my mind.

I have a go too, and conclude that there is no substitute for the rough and tumble of a road-test (preferably in someone else's car) to discover a vehicle's true strengths and weaknesses. And the Hummer is rather good, if you don't think about the miles per gallon. If Britain's roads get any worse, which they surely will given the current belt-tightening, General Motors should find a way of reducing its thirst, and put it back into production. ■

HOW NOT TO WRECK YOUR CAR

Steer clear of bumps Driving over cobblestones or speed bumps takes its toll on the suspension. As do pot-holes.

Keep calm Aggressive driving means greater wear-and-tear.

Get a jet-wash Rust gets worse when roads are salted, so jet-wash under the car in winter.

Polish pockmarks Stones thrown up by other cars chip the paintwork, leaving small pits which can rust. These need to be repaired or have polish rubbed into them.

Don't make a splash Water can wreck electronics, and even engines, so take big puddles slowly.

Do your homework Even 4x4s can come to grief when you head off-road. Know their limits or get off-roading lessons.

READER OFFER

Enjoy a complimentary cheese and wine tasting experience in The Northall restaurant, and a room upgrade at the elegant, new five star Corinthia Hotel London

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Situated off Whitehall with spectacular views across to the Houses of Parliament and over the Thames to the London Eye - it is hard not to be impressed by the huge chandelier comprised of 1001 beautifully crafted Baccarat crystals hanging in the airy lobby, or its book-filled bedrooms - which are some of the largest in London, or indeed its next generation spa by ESPA which offers an extraordinary four floors of integrated health and well-being treatments.

DRINKING & DINING

It is in its bars and speciality restaurants that Corinthia Hotel London really scores, offering endless opportunities for entertaining at all times of day. You can enjoy dinner in Massimo - the seafood restaurant and oyster bar, artfully designed by the David Collins Studio, drink cocktails in the musically inspired Bassoon bar, or enjoy The Northall, a light airy restaurant that looks out over the river which is as perfect for a business breakfast as it is for lunch or dinner. The Northall is a rare find because it is alive at almost every time of day; breakfast segues into lunch and then into that terrific British tradition of High Tea, before it moves gently into dinner where you will be served some of the best locally sourced and organic produce and fine wines.

THE OFFER

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SPORT

Wanted: more Wimbledons

Striking a balance between sport and commerce is now fiendishly hard, but one big event does manage it. **Tim de Lisle** explains

As IT IS an odd-numbered year, there is no big sports tournament to light up or suffocate our summer. The brief gap between football seasons will not be filled by more football. The star players will be busy sunning themselves at seven-star hotels in Dubai, calling their lawyers to discuss superinjunctions, or converting their home cinemas to 3-D. What they should be doing, for two weeks from June 20th, is watching tennis.

Wimbledon is holding its 125th championships this year. Barring the two world wars, it has been going since 1877 (the same year as cricket's first Test match). The reason the footballers should be watching, along with many other sports people, is that Wimbledon has quietly become a model for modern sport, by pulling off two fiendishly difficult tricks. It strikes the right balance between sport and commerce, and between tradition and evolution.

Why Wimbledon, more than other major tennis tournaments? First, because it is the only one still played on grass, which is the most natural surface for tennis, the fastest, the most exciting, and now, because it survives in so few places, the one that asks the most questions of the players, forcing them to adapt their game and think on their feet.

As well as questions for the players, sport poses ever tougher questions for administrators. The most difficult one is how commercial they should be. Where do you draw the line between money and sport?

We sports fans are apt to see the world in black and white, or green and white, and to think that the choice is between being commercial and being anti-commercial. So when yet another football club puts video billboards all round the edge of the pitch, the better to tell us about their new strip or to let bookmakers give us the latest odds on the very match we are trying to watch, we tend to shrug our shoulders and say that it's the way of the world, when the only things moving in our field of view should be the ball, the players, the referee and the manager's arms.

Well matched
Centre Court, 2009 and 1935, featuring Roger Federer and Gottfried von Cramm
The biggest change is the trousers

Well, it's not the way of Wimbledon. Think of these championships – the air of calm, the players wearing white, the ballboys and girls scuttling across the court, the spectators tucking into strawberries and cream, the umpires murmuring "Quiet please", the referee fretting about the rain, and the epic duels down the ages, from McEnroe-Borg to Federer-Nadal, through to that astonishing match last year between two men we had never heard of, which went on so long that by the end ("Isner leads 69-68, final set") they seemed like old friends. All this adds to Wimbledon's aura.

It's also about what doesn't happen. Not only does Wimbledon disdain moving billboards: it avoids stationary ones. There is empty lawn either side of Centre Court, and that is what it remains – uncluttered and elegant, which is one reason why the TV audience is so easily entranced. There is no branding on the grass itself, as in cricket or rugby; no loud logos on the players' chests, as in so many sports. Federer and Nadal do not find themselves competing for the McDonald's Men's Singles. No matches are scheduled in the morning, or the late evening; it just sometimes happens that a game drifts on into the long summer twilight. The trophies are presented, rather diffidently, by the Duke of Kent, not by celebrities. In the age of the corporate jolly, most tickets still go to true tennis lovers, via local clubs or the famous ballot. And at £35-110, the prices are a lot less greedy than they might be. >

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> But Wimbledon isn't blindly conservative. Since 2007 it has offered as much prize money for the women's events as for the men's, dismaying the die-hards who point out that the women play fewer sets. In 2009, it added a high-tech sliding roof to Centre Court. In the 1990s, it was one of the first big sports events to see the need for a whole-hearted website.

Nor is it anti-commercial. After tennis turned professional, in 1968, Wimbledon surprised the sports world by jumping into bed with Mark McCormack's International Management Group. This could have been the ruin of it, but the relationship, which continues to this day, has been marked by something almost unknown among sports agents: restraint. IMG doesn't look for quantity in the deals it strikes on Wimbledon's behalf, but for quality and longevity. Watch a match on television, and you may see only two brand names: IBM and Rolex. Both are forced to fit in with Wimbledon's colour scheme, so their logos appear in white or yellow on a dark green background. Both are in it for the long haul: Rolex has been there since 1978, IBM since 1990. And both are more than just sponsors. Rolex supplies watches and clocks for what Wimbledon likes to call "the ivy-covered scoreboards". IBM supplies the software that puts scores on the web before the umpire can say "Miss Sharapova leads 5-4". There are other deals – balls from Slazenger, water from Evian – but they are unobtrusive.

Wimbledon is an improbable paragon. It is British – you can't get much more English than the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club – and the pattern in most sports has been for the British way to be superseded, whether by American or Indian turbo-capitalism (as seen in English football and world cricket), or Swiss-based feudal sleaze (FIFA and the IOC). As a club, Wimbledon is an oligarchy. It can be stuffy – ballgirls were not let into Centre Court till 1985 – but compared with the commercial din of Formula One or the toxic bubble of club football, it has got most things right.

As oligarchies go, this is an enlightened one, conscious that it rules, if only for two weeks a year, by consent of the people. It is nimble enough to surf popular sentiment, allowing the grass slope by the big screen to be known as Henman Hill or, as some now say, Murray Mound; an unwritten rule states that there has to be a plucky Brit who gets no further than the semi-final.

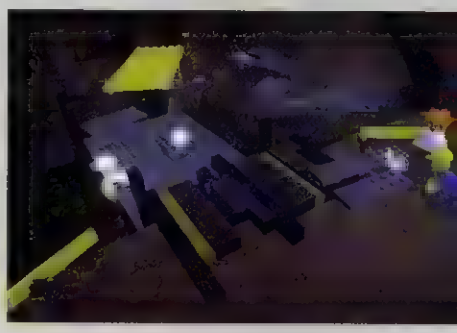
It helps that tennis is a relatively grown-up sport. The players are individuals, not the clones that the clubs churn out. Tennis players run their own lives: while footballers wait to be dropped by the coach, in tennis the coach wonders if the player will drop him. But even by tennis standards, Wimbledon is exceptional, and for a simple reason: it puts sport first. ■

A GAME, A GADGET AND AN APP

Jambox, meet Dropbox

Tom Standage finds neat ways to amplify music and carry documents around, and relaxes with some electronic Lego

A GAME Lego Universe



For family gaming, it's hard to beat Lego, and "Lego Star Wars" in particular. And for something more expansive, "Lego Universe" fits the bill. It's a "massively multiplayer online" (MMO) game in which your mini-figure fights bad guys, completes quests, searches for treasure and constructs elaborate Lego buildings that other players can visit. After a few missions you are invited to become a warrior, an explorer, a scientist or a builder, unlocking new missions and special skills. You can train animals, collect hidden items and race vehicles in a child-friendly world where interaction with others is carefully controlled. MMO fans will grumble about the lack of team-play options – at times this feels like a single-player game in which other players happen to be present – and the lack of depth compared with grown-up examples of the genre. But new elements are added all the time (such as a ninja-themed world, to my son's delight) and the result is a stepping-stone between the childish things of "Club Penguin" and the grown-up pleasures of "World of Warcraft".

Lego Universe (PC/Mac) £14.99/€19.99/$19.99 (incl. first month), then £7.49/€9.99/$9.99 a month

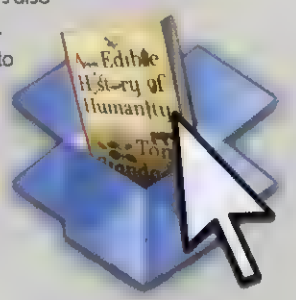
A GADGET Jawbone Jambox

What do you do in those situations – having lunch in the garden, or staying in a holiday home – when you want some music, but there's no stereo? The puny speaker on your phone will hardly do the job. My family's trick is to take an empty tube of Pringles (all too often close at hand) and use it as a low-tech amplifier by putting an iPhone in it. Sit it on a table and it does a pretty good job. But this summer our music is coming from a Jawbone Jambox – a small battery-powered portable speaker that streams music via Bluetooth from your phone and packs a surprising bassy punch, given that it's smaller than a box of After Eights. It's simple, elegant and charged via USB. It can also act as a speakerphone. We'll have to find a new use for the Pringles tube.

Jawbone Jambox about £159/€200/$200. Also in black, grey or blue

AN APP Dropbox

Dropbox is the kind of app that makes you wonder how you lived without it. You install the software on your Mac, PC, iPhone, iPad, BlackBerry or Android device. A Dropbox folder appears, and items you put in it are available on all your devices. Soon you're moving everything you're working on into your Dropbox, so you can get to it from anywhere, and it's also being backed up on Dropbox's servers in the cloud. This is one of the easiest ways to get documents onto your iPhone or iPod, or to share them with other people. It's free for up to 2 gigabytes of storage, and you can pay for more capacity if you need it. No wonder Dropbox already has 25m users – or that its slogan is "Simplify your life". It really does.



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FASHION

It's all in the moves

Why do models stand as they do? **Isabel Lloyd** ponders the ins and outs of posing, and Royal Ballet dancers show how it could be done

FASHION IS ALL a pose. Or, it's all about poses. Think about it for a moment: stand even an unusually beautiful model, wearing unusually beautiful clothes, straight on in front of a camera, arms down, unsmiling. She may well look like a serial killer. A well-dressed serial killer, but still, not someone you'd want for a friend. Yet if the same model puts her hands on her waist and arches her back slightly – the first pose most models will strike in a session – immediately the clothes gain structure, while the space between arms and torso stops the picture being blocky and dull. Look at Lady Gaga on the cover of American *Vogue*: if she wasn't posing hands-on-waist her dress would be a shapeless sack, and the world's hottest pop star would look like a woman in a wig who didn't know what to do with her arms. Posing is a necessary evil.

A good model understands the value of the pose. The likes of Erin O'Connor or Jon Kortajarena (the actor-model who played Carlos, the James Dean-alike in "A Single Man") know how to make shapes that please the lens. Old-school models such as Twiggy have superb posture and a sleek repertoire of moves. Even so, the photographs on these pages show that, when it comes to striking a pose, the best models aren't models at all. They're dancers.

The clothes here look so good because of the athleticism and poise of the bodies inside them. That's not to dismiss the work of the band of mostly young, independent designers you see here. Their creations are cunningly constructed, deeply thought about, and well made. But when worn by members of the Royal Ballet in London, they acquire an extra dimension.

Why? Because "a professional dancer has total body awareness," says Olivia Pomp, the German-born, London-based stylist who created this project with the photographer Rick Guest. "Many young models have no idea how to pose properly. But a professional dancer's whole training is about pose and posture. The way they use their body to communicate is so much more eloquent and elegant."

A young model, new to the business, will be told to spend as much time as possible studying herself in the mirror, a piece of necessary narcissism intended to make her familiar with what she actually looks like. But fitting in hours of self-appreciation between nights out at Chinawhite, not eating anything, and finishing your A-levels is perhaps a bit much to expect of the average 17-year-old. A dancer on the other hand will spend from 10am to 5.30pm, six days a week, in the rehearsal room, lapped in their own reflections. No surprise, then, that they have a mental compendium of what they look like, from every angle. Making an interesting shape for a photographer comes as naturally to them as breathing.

Dancers also have another attribute lacking in the average skinny adolescent model: extraordinary strength. Look at the pose on page 42: Edward Watson appears to be hovering weightlessly a couple of feet above the concrete studio floor. To achieve this kind of height, a dancer needs intense power in the levering musculature of the legs. But he also relies on his "core": a set of muscles that wraps from the spine around the lower torso and gives a founding stability to the entire body. Dance teachers often instruct pupils >

PHOTOGRAPHER *RICK GUEST* STYLIST *OLIVIA POMP*

Johannes Stepanek wears black balloon trousers, £300, by Paulo Ribeiro

Styling assistant Charlotte Barrett *Male grooming* Pete Smith *Hair and make-up* Nancy Tavilla *Photo assistants* Josh Schinner and Jonangelo Molinari *Digital operator* Nick Richards

> to begin all their movements from this core: the strong abdomen is the stone, the outflung arm the ripples on the pond. The straight line of Watson's shoulders and the relaxed curl of his fingers are all built on this bedrock. His apparent ease is anything but easy to achieve.

Real models don't have to jump about to show clothes off, do they? Well actually, yes they do. According to Olivia: "With clothes that are quite soft or that have a lot of fabric in them, getting a model to jump adds movement. Say you have to shoot a lovely Issey Miyake dress, with a lot of fine pleats, if you ask the model to jump it will balloon out hugely and look really interesting." Indeed, it's a trope of high fashion and advertising to see a model hanging upside down or leaping about apparently unsupported. "But 90% of pictures like that will be done with a trampoline," Olivia says, "which gives a completely different jump: the bounciness comes from the trampoline, not from the body. Quite often these shots have to be done over and over again, because as the model jumps their faces distort, or their arms end up in the wrong place. Dancers, though, are able to control almost every muscle in their bodies; they are like elastic."

Posing, like everything else in fashion, has its fashions. A model of the 1950s will typically elongate her neck and, often, show her face in profile. Arms are usually raised swanlike (think of Richard Avedon's 1955 shot of the model Dovima poised between two elephants), and one foot is nearly always pointed in front of the other. Her job is to display *de haut en bas* hats, Grace Kelly gloves, tiny, pursed waists.

By the 1960s, hauteur gives way to proto-hippy: the Mary-Quant-in-a-mini pose. Typically, the model sits facing the camera, hands tipped prayerfully under the chin, knees pressed tight together, feet wide apart and tilted onto their toes to make an inverted v. The (literal) rise of the short skirt demanded knees stayed together for the sake of decency, but adding gawky angles to feet and hands suggested coltish youthfulness at a time when youth was first getting into its stride. Also, having models sit kept the focus on the legs. The decade was steered by leg-men: look at Lewis Morley's picture, taken in 1963, of Christine Keeler naked on a plywood chair. It's just four bare limbs and a pout.

The modern way is all poor posture and pigeon toes, a look glamorised for a generation in 1993 when >

OPPOSITE Edward Watson wears black shorts, model's own; black coat, £1,342, by Rui Leonardes
ABOVE LEFT Zenaida Yanowsky wears black leotard, model's own; knitted leather tape cape dress with chiffon fringe, £595 to order only, by Derek Lawlor
ABOVE RIGHT Leanne Benjamin wears black strappy top, model's own; black leggings with leather strap detailing, £235 to order only, by Derek Lawlor; "Bauhaus" mahogany and gold-leaf cube bangles, £480 each, by Belmacz

ABOVE LEFT Edward Watson wears black shorts, model's own; headpiece, price on request, by Hannah Morgan
ABOVE RIGHT Marianela Nuñez wears leotard, model's own; cord trellis trimming (worn as scarf), £40 per metre, to order only, by Derek Lawlor. Thiago Soares wears grey shorts, model's own; cord/chiffon embellished arm-piece, £295 to order only, by Derek Lawlor
OPPOSITE Eric Underwood wears grey pleated trousers, £380, by Paulo Ribeiro

> Corinne Day snapped Kate Moss in her vest. Known as the Shag-Me-in-a-Tower-Block stance, it has been developed and refined by cohorts of models. The geometry is instantly recognisable: shoulders drooped unrealistically and asymmetrically, one ankle crossed over the other, hands hanging loosely down in front of the body. A pose of extreme teenagery wh'everness, it is meant, stylists tell you, to suggest "edge"; at its worst, it simply suggests a lobotomy.

There are echoes of industry-standard poses in the pictures here. Or maybe not so much echoes as amplifications. Leanne Benjamin *(previous page)* seems to be doing a version of the round-shouldered, I've-just-been-punched-in-the-solar-plexus pose. But she does it on point; and you suspect anyone who punched her abdominals would come away with bruised knuckles. Meanwhile Edward Watson, wearing one of Hannah Morgan's sculptural headpieces, instinctively presents himself sideways on, one shoulder raised, in the kind of arrested zig-zag that the swimwear photographer George Hoyningen-Heune stared down his lens at in the 1930s.

Morgan is studying millinery at the Royal College of Art in London; she says she designed this particular piece to "make people think about the relation of a hat to the shoulders". Rui Leonardes, who made the coat on page 42, trained as a classical dancer in Portugal and Holland before going to London College of Fashion to study menswear. Paulo Ribeiro's balloon trousers, combining controlled tailoring and softly fluid fabrics, were inspired, he says, by the muscles of a horse. All these designers appear to understand bodies, and make clothes that look good on the move. Even if you're not striking a pose. ■

The Royal Ballet dance ***Romeo and Juliet*** *at the O2 Arena, London SE10, June 17th to 19th, www.theo2.co.uk*

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Rebecca Willis *Applied Fashion*

Happiness is a state of undress: why it's time to stop worrying and love the bikini

YOU KNOW THE dream where you are at the office, or walking down a busy street, and you suddenly realise you are completely naked? The dream is supposed to be about shame and inadequacy, but I've long suspected that it's really about beach holidays. They can strike an unseasonal chill into the female heart, because – unless you're a cabaret artiste or a model – a bikini is the most revealing thing you are ever likely to wear in public. For many women, the prospect of a beach holiday is like getting an invitation to a wonderful party with fantastic people in a beautiful setting, and then seeing that it says "dress: underwear".

It ought to be an unalloyed pleasure to be on a beach in the warm sun: not quite naturism, but still a communing of the body with nature that modern life mostly precludes. So why is the clear blue horizon so often clouded by a flicker of self-doubt? It's that modern malaise again, body image: whereas the body itself was the problem for Victorians, our obsession plays out inside the head, rather than in the drawing room. We live in a world that records and distributes images as never before, so that the freakish images of womanhood the media pumps out begin to seem normal. This is the time of year to remind yourself that they are not – neither the size-zero model nor the girl on page three.

Step one is to get a copy of "Fat is a Feminist Issue", do some revision, and get angry – anger is the best defence against the fashion magazines that fetishise the new, creating a sense of inadequacy with our wardrobes and ourselves in order to propel us towards the shops with our wallets hanging out. And we need extra-strong defences now when there are articles everywhere telling us how to Get a Bikini Body in Just Six Weeks and ridiculing celebrities who have forgotten to hold in their tummies while on holiday. It's a pincer movement that can induce panic in grown-ups, even when we think we've got over ourselves.

Feeling good in a bikini – or, better still, forgetting we're wearing one – is about getting used to how we are. Most of what makes us ourselves, as Michael Jackson helpfully demonstrated, is not subject to successful alteration: our height, build and colouring are life companions. Unless you are obese, diet and exercise change only the margins: you still look like you. More or less toned, perhaps, a bit curvier or a bit leaner, but basically you. So let's not waste time agonising. The sooner we recognise that we're a Rubens, a Giacometti or somewhere in between, the sooner we can get on with enjoying things like summer holidays. Whatever the magazines may say, a bikini is a state of mind: it's 99% about acceptance, and only 1% about shopping.

While we're here, though, let's deal briefly (as it were) with that 1%. The young and the Giacometti-ish may be able to wear teeny string bikinis, but the rest of us need to know about Heidi Klein online (www.heidiklein.com). Until you've worn a Klein bikini, you can't imagine how it could be worth the £175-odd price tag. The answer is careful cutting designed to flatter different shapes, quick-drying and hard-wearing fabrics, and discreet support (side boning, underwiring, lining, power mesh). Top and bottom sizes can be mixed and matched, and many are adjustable. You can now mix styles, too, and there's a new D-G cup range.

If you can't or won't do investment undressing, try the British store Debenhams for a cheaper range by Melissa Odabash – another designer who knows about flattering swimwear. Alternatively it can be good to buy on holiday, when you've got used to wandering around with not much on. I was like a child in a sweet shop when I discovered a tiny boutique called Tezuk in Milano Marittima, with drawer upon drawer of bikini tops and bottoms in different sizes, styles and colours (I have a silvery one from there which should have been put out to grass, but is somehow still in my cupboard). But you have to be someone who enjoys the quest aspect of shopping to want to spend holiday time like this.

A century ago, women didn't swim, they "bathed", wearing voluminous costumes with bloomers and skirts and – wait for it – stockings. It must have been like swimming in seaweed. We are lucky to live in an age and a culture that allows us to exercise our bodies in water and to feel the delicious lap of it against our bare skin. Many women in the world still can't. Without meaning to be too heavy about this most lightweight piece of clothing, we owe it to them, and those women who went before us, to strive for our prelapsarian day in the sun. We should wear our bikinis with pride and count our blessings. The beach is a feminist issue too. ■

ILLUSTRATION BILL BROWN

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THE LINE OF BEAUTY

Moustaches

They are either beyond the pale, or, as now, suddenly fashionable. And this has been the case for 2,000 years. **Matthew Sweet** tracks the moustache through the ages

Terracotta soldier China, 210BC
Women express their ideas, feelings and desires through language. Men have another option: to inscribe their unarticulated thoughts in the subtle calligraphy of the moustache. This Qin dynasty infantryman spent two millennia in the dark, guarding the body of the first emperor of all China in a vast mausoleum beneath Shaanxi province. Between them, he and his 7,000-odd terracotta comrades possess 24 different kinds of moustache. But even if the precise meaning of each swoop and curl is lost, we know what is written on this man's face: if my blade can do this to me, just imagine what it might do to you.

James Franco Solve Sundsbo, 2010
For the past quarter-century, the moustache has been the preserve of geography lecturers and flashers. Now it has been reclaimed. Here's a modern Narcissus doing some of that reclamation – caught in the act of seducing his own reflection. Filmgoers know him as James Franco, the star of "127 Hours", a man so self-assured he can look cool while severing his own tendons. Born in 1978, he may be too young to understand how this 'tache transforms him into one of Tom of Finland's hustlers. Google Franco, however, and you'll see that similar notions have occurred to plenty of others.

Rembrandt Self-portrait, 1630
Rembrandt van Rijn! The handsome devil! How many hours must he have spent making faces at himself in the mirror, while his stylus scratched away at a waxed copper plate? Thousands, clearly, capturing the wispy squiggle of his pale moustache – a moustache that hundreds of lesser European artists would adopt in the hope of acquiring some of his greatness. Etching is a laborious business, a rigmarole of acid and metal and ink. But Rembrandt has used it to produce something as spontaneous as a Polaroid. Those eyes, that mouth – and what unwinds above it – have clearly been taken by surprise.

SCALA CORBIS SOLVE SUNDSBO/ART+COMMERCE MARY EVANS

General George A. Custer 1863

This grubby tangle of hair faced the enemy during Custer's Last Stand – and was surely sufficiently slick and massy to have provided a final resting place for Custer's last sandwich. The general was felled by Cheyenne in 1876, but his moustache helped speed his iconisation. Its drooping blondness inspired newspaper eulogists to compare him with the Viking commanders of old: this was a moustache fit for Valhalla. But Custer himself did not treat it with too much deference. Once, for a prank, he shaved it off and mailed it to his wife.

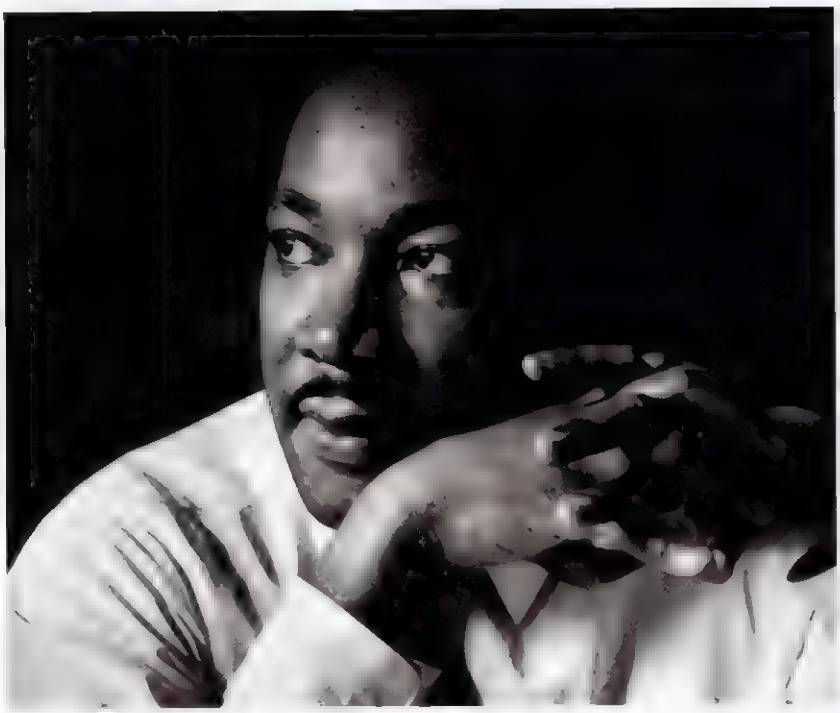
Friedrich Nietzsche c1890

Scores of people wanted to stop the mouth of the God-killing philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. So perhaps his great swathe of moustache is a gag about his own gagging. It certainly wasn't grown by accident – despite Nietzsche's belief that free will is an illusion. A man who wears one of these monsters, he argued, "will usually be seen as no more than the appurtenance of a large moustache" and can therefore "sit...in its shade and feel safe there". It wasn't Nietzsche, however, for whom Nietzsche's ideas proved dangerous.

The Little Tramp
In 1915 the world caught Chaplinitis – and the Little Tramp from the movies became the most recognisable human on the planet. His moustache was the key to this epidemiology: it made Charles Spencer Chaplin reducible to a simple pictogram, soon read as a symbol of irrepressible individuality. That worried the British Army, which banned men from growing toothbrush moustaches in the trenches. In time, it came to worry Hitler, too. The epidemic may be over, but the fever breaks out occasionally: these children are snapped in the act of christening Chaplin Square, north London, in 1989.

Clark Gable 1932
Lazy men don't have pencil moustaches. Achieving this sharpest of looks – as Clark Gable knew – required diligent labour. Careful razor-work just under the nose; a clear, clean line carved in parallel with the top lip. Though his greatest cinematic moment came opposite Vivien Leigh in the Technicolor dawn of "Gone with the Wind", Gable achieved his stardom in the lean years of the Depression. Most of the men in the movie-theatre audience couldn't hope to emulate his expensive dress-sense, but they could conjure a copy of that ladykilling moustache. All it took was time, self-respect, and a disposable Gillette.

Frida Kahlo c1940
Any fair-weather female gender-bender can stick on a moustache and man up for the afternoon. Madonna's done it. So have Beryl Reid and Maggi Hambling. But it takes a true artist to grow one. Kahlo cultivated her sub-nasal line of fuzz: groomed it with a little comb, and exaggerated it in her self-portraits, rendering each hair with an individual stroke of her paintbrush. The result? Images that suggest that men do not have a monopoly on the outward signs of masculinity; that it may only be social convention that prevents women from wresting ownership of the moustache from their lovers, husbands, fathers and sons.



Martin Luther King 1964

The first American journalist to profile Dr Martin Luther King, future martyr to the cause of civil rights, was impressed by his modest physical appearance: "His clothes are in conservative good taste," he reported, "and he has a small trim moustache." Many of the articles that followed found room for something similar. An ordered, unsensational exterior made King's message of liberation harder to dismiss, sweetening his radicalism, and reflecting the reasonableness of his campaign for equality and dignity. Unreason, of course, did for him in the end

John Waters 1994

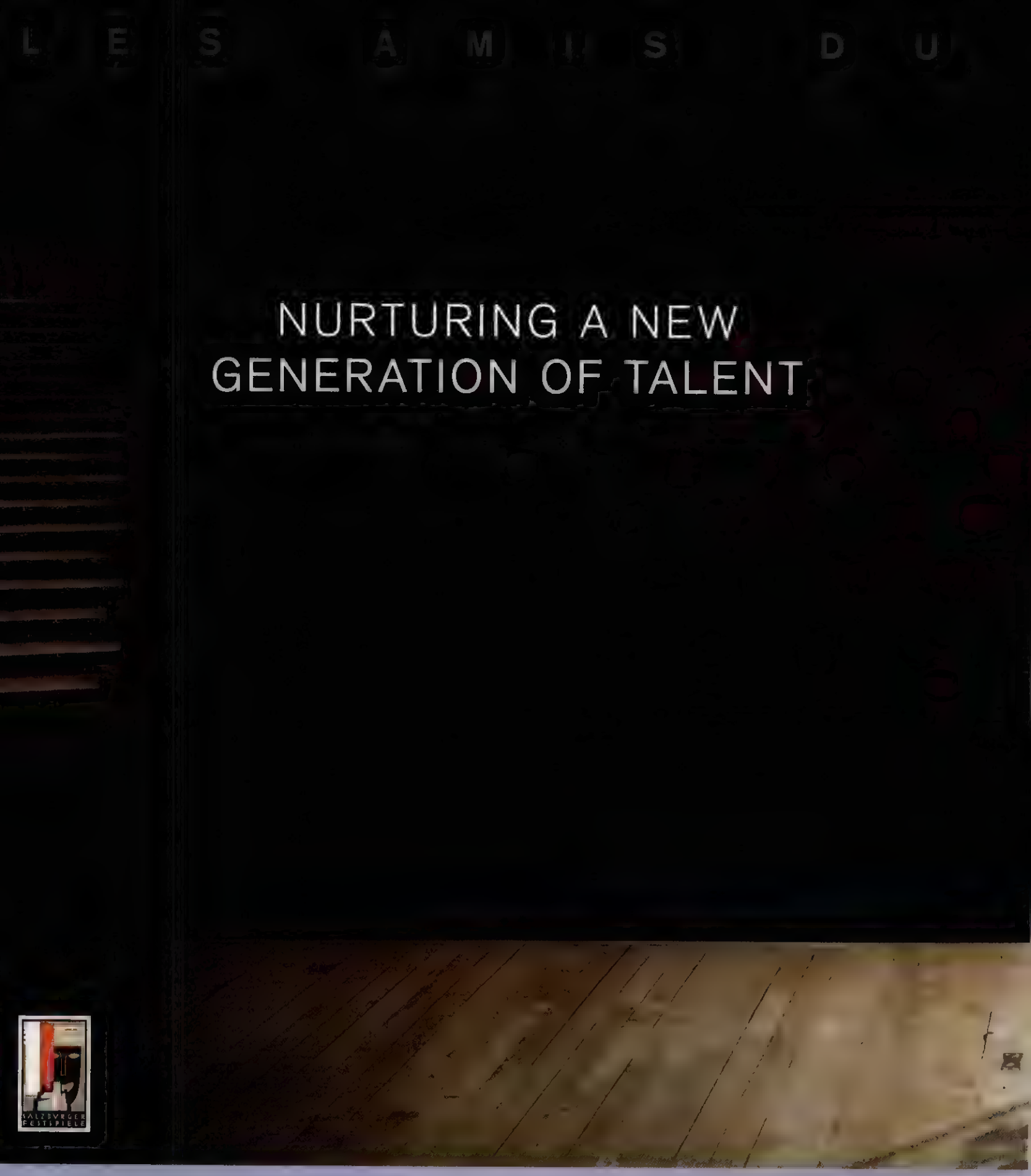
When he first grew it (or etched it) in the early 1970s, the film-maker John Waters, once and future king of "Mondo Trasho", believed he was the only white American weird enough for a Little Richard moustache. That pencil-line of hair, curled by a sensual sneer, is a sign of his liberation from the tyranny of good taste. There are other signs, too. Waters likes to terminate parties by playing his treasured 1978 recording of the notorious Jim Jones sect committing mass suicide by drinking Kool-Aid laced with cyanide. "I felt my record collection needed it," he once told me – and the moustache twisted its agreement. ■

Burt Reynolds 1972

The 1970s was the most hirsute decade of the 20th century; the least plucked, waxed and depilated. Burt Reynolds embodied that luxuriance, as the pubic weft of his facial hair surged and shifted like the price of oil. His films mark his progress: from the philtrum-hugging curve of "Smokey and the Bandit" to the prongs subdividing his face in "Gator" and the Zapata tribute act beneath his nose in "100 Rifles". Here, off screen but still in the public eye at LAX, he parades two tough strips of masculinity, as well as several types of furniture fabric. It is 1972 – the last year, perhaps, before such a moustache went gay, and bespoke the bathhouse rather than the roughhouse.

REX GETTY COBB & GREG GORMAN

NURTURING A NEW GENERATION OF TALENT



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THE SCEPTICAL SHOPPER

Coffee-shop coffee

Finding a coffee shop, in Europe or America, could hardly be easier. But where is the really good coffee? Our undercover expert spills the beans

Some Australian friends recently came back from a trip to Italy. Nice place, great buildings, lovely people, they said. Shame about the coffee.

Navigating the world of coffee shops has become a confusing business. Just when we'd mastered one set of terminology – "skinny latte with wings" – along came another: flat white, short black, microfoam. For coffee geeks, it is no longer enough for a cappuccino to be frothy. The milk must be dense and creamy rather than airy and fluffy. The beans should be burr-ground. The top of the drink must be embellished not with chocolate but with "latte art" – patterns formed by the pouring skill of the barista. Very few cafés live up to this ideal. Italy has the baristas but not the beans: cheap, pre-ground bricks of Lavazza are still the norm. The big chain cafés of Europe and America have fresh beans but often clueless baristas. For the sceptical shopper, it can be a case of coffee, coffee everywhere and not a decent drop to drink.

How do you choose the best cup of coffee? In this market, the usual rule of thumb – pick the most expensive option – doesn't apply. In any given country, the price point of a large milky coffee is remarkably static. Italian consumers, for example, don't pay much more than €1.30 a cup. Australians happily pay A$3.50 (€2.56). Meanwhile, in Britain and America, the price of a latte sticks at around £2.40 (€2.70) and $3 (€2.10) respectively. But this same price might buy you a truly

PHOTOGRAPH BEN MONK HOME ECONOMIST JANICE MURFITT

sublime "flat white" (like a stronger, denser cappuccino) from the likes of Prufrock in east London or Café Grumpy in New York, or it might buy you an overmilky, vaguely metallic beverage from a big chain.

To the sceptical mind, however, one is not necessarily worse value than the other. It all depends what you want from a coffee shop: artisanal pleasure, or rocket fuel for the working brain. At the big chains, little of your money pays for coffee, or the bucket of milk it comes with – most of it goes on rent. I sometimes go to Starbucks, even though I don't rate its espresso. Why? Because the £2.40 it charges for a flat white is a modest outlay for hiring office space for a couple of hours. By contrast, you don't go to branches of the British mini-chain Monmouth Coffee Company to work: they're too crowded and uncomfortable. You go to relish the incredible flavours.

If it's flavour you are after, there are now whole clusters of geeky coffee shops in big cities, proponents of what's been christened coffee's third wave. (The first wave in coffee drinking was the post-war, post-austerity coffee-shop boom, the second the 1990s Starbucks explosion of voluminous drinks with quirky names: doppio decaf, grande mocha). For third-wave purists a great cup of coffee is largely a question of physics, with minimal room for variation. First, pull a perfect espresso (a "godshot"). You will, apparently, only achieve this on a machine that is kicking out 85-95°C water at nine bars of pressure. The coffee itself should be ground super-fine and be tamped twice, using 20-30lbs of pressure, to make a pellet through which water will penetrate evenly and without "twirling". After 30 seconds of extraction, you should have a syrupy shot with a golden orange crema (white crema is bad – it signifies bitterness). Onto the milk: the steam tip needs to be immersed deep in the jug to produce a finely textured "wet foam". After this microfoam is swirled into the espresso, the final texture should be like velvet.

Almost every cup of coffee sold through the big chains falls short of this exacting ideal. The norm is a vat of milk flavoured with burnt espresso; and both the milk and the espresso are usually too hot, which makes the coffee bitter and the milk sulphurous. The only countries where perfect lattes are the norm rather than the exception – and therefore no big deal – are Australia and New Zealand.

No one can agree why Antipodean coffee is so good. I'd suggest it's something to do with a mass influx of Italians after the war colliding with the laid-back café culture of Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland. Whatever the reason, coffee geeks now rate Melbourne as the best city in the world to live, where you can count on your "short black" being a godshot and your "flattie" a nerve-jangling glass of heaven (the Aussie style is to serve it in glasses not cups).

Third-wave coffee shops have now reached Berlin, New York, San Francisco – but strangely, not Paris, which has wonderful cafés serving mediocre coffee. As for London, over the past couple of years it has become possible to do a flat-white tour of the capital. It's like being in Seattle in the 1990s, only better. You can stroll from Fernandez & Wells on Beak Street (where they also make a "stumpy", like an intenser flat white), via Lantana and Kaffeine (two groovy places off Oxford Street) and on to Store Street Espresso in Bloomsbury (unlike most third-wave cafés, actually a comfy place to sit, with free Wi-Fi). Finish up in the mother of them all, the tiny Monmouth Coffee Company in Covent Garden, where the milk is from Jersey cows and the espressos so sweet that the pots of unrefined sugar are an irrelevance.

Some of this coffee is so complex and fragrant – cherries! raisins! molasses! – you find yourself inhaling deeply like a wine connoisseur, ignoring the loud pounding from your caffeine-pumped heart. Yet for a sceptic, the perfectionism can get a bit earnest. Most consumers just want a latte in a hurry; yet third-wave baristas can spend so long obsessing over every detail that you queue for an eternity and end up with a lukewarm drink. If all you are looking for is a hot drink to go with a quick panini, this can be a bit much. So here's to the fourth wave: the same focus on good coffee, but with less fuss. Coffee needs to calm down. ■

CUP WINNERS

Monmouth Coffee Company
Founded in 1978, the minuscule Monmouth has been serving third-wave coffee since before the second wave existed. Its flat white lingers in the mouth like old brandy – but be prepared for weekend queues of up to half an hour. *27 Monmouth Street, London WC2, plus branches; www.monmouthcoffee.co.uk; £2.35*

Flat White
Not somewhere you come to work: the music is pounding and the tables small. But the coffee – made with extraordinary precision with beans from the uber-geeky firm Square Mile Coffee Roasters – leaves you woozy with pleasure. *Berwick Street, London W1; www.flatwhitecafe.com; £2.50*

La Colombe Torrefaction
La Colombe shops aren't cluttered with extraneous panini or juices, just pastries – buttery and superb – and coffee, which comes dark-roasted in patterned Italian mugs, made by baristas who are just the right side of surly. *Branches in Philadelphia and New York; www.lacolombe.com; $2.75*

Brother Baba Budan
Even in the world capital of flat whites, this tiny shop stands out. Funky baristas, single-origin beans, chairs hanging from the ceiling (seriously) and an exceptionally smooth flat white are all reasons to squeeze in here. *Little Bourke Street, Melbourne; www.brotherbabubudan.com.au; A$3.50*

Bonanza Coffee Heroes
Aficionados rate this grey-fronted outlet as Berlin's best, offering creamy-thick microfoam and syrupy espressos, though no decaf. Good on sunny days, when you can loll on the outdoor benches. *Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin; www.bonanzacoffee.de; €2.50*

All prices are for a regular latte

MAN IN A SUIT

Simon Morris

An entrepreneur who loves film and fighting gets a suit that makes an impact

THE MAN

Simon Morris likes the word "love". "There's something about it that just works," he says. But Morris is no wide-eyed romantic. He's a 46-year-old London adman turned entrepreneur and one of the driving forces behind Lovefilm, the mail-order rental service, which was sold to Amazon in January, for a sum, the *Financial Times* reported, in the region of £200m.

The company began in 2004 and was immediately pitched into what Morris calls "a real street-fight" with several rivals. It emerged victorious – names such as Screen Select and Webflix are long gone, while Lovefilm claims 1.6m subscribers in Britain, Germany and Scandinavia. Morris is clearly good at listening to his customers, but also talks a good battle: he makes the dry business of mergers and acquisitions sound as adrenaline-pumped as the bare-knuckle brawls in "Fight Club", a favourite movie of his. He even turns up at the interview sporting a black eye and a limp – the result of an overenthusiastic kick-boxing session.

He has a history of being attracted to what he calls the "rock'n'roll" end of business, and spent some wild years running Ginger TV for the British DJ Chris Evans, during his rackety, drink-'em-under-the-table days. But Morris's most recent investment is in a company that's defiantly good for you: Graze, which delivers boxed sets of healthy snacks, tailored online, direct to customers' desks. After three years, it has more than 400,000 subscribers. And, despite what Morris refers to as his "colourful" past, his wide-boy veneer doesn't obscure his warmth. During the course of our chat he enthuses about Indian food, books a restaurant as a surprise for his wife, and admits that, as well as "Gladiator" and "Fight Club", his favourite films include the gentle, cross-generational romance "Harold and Maud". All the while, he is sipping a hot-pink raspberry lassi. A little bit raging bull? Certainly. But more love, actually.

THE SUIT

To complement Morris's complex persona, we picked a formal, three-piece suit in a grey discreet enough for the boardroom, but with a scaled-up windowpane check that adds a touch of East End swagger, and a bold shirt and tie to give a warm gust of colour. The verdict of the not-so-hard man himself? "Great: louche, shocking, interesting." ~ KASSIA ST CLAIR

THE DETAILS

Grey wool checked single-breasted suit, £595, and matching waistcoat, £95, both by William Hunt (www.williamhunt.co.uk); dark blue shirt, £28 for a shirt-and-tie set (tie not used), by Next (www.next.co.uk); slim shocking-pink tie, £75, by Gieves & Hawkes (www.gievesandhawkes.com); black tasselled loafers, £405, by Mr Hare, available from Cruise (www.cruisefashion.co.uk).

PHOTOGRAPHER *LEE STRICKLAND* STYLIST *NICKI BLACK*

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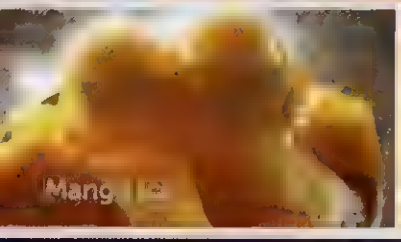

Mang

meat

Tea

Wharf

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WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

The rock star who wrote "Hope I die before I get old" is now 66. In a candid interview, Pete Townshend of The Who tells **Simon Garfield** about life in a "celebration machine" – and the moment that was nearly his downfall

Rock music in 2011 is not quite what it was in the mid-1960s. For one thing, it is full of challenging coincidences, such as the one reported by Pete Townshend in a recent e-mail. "I was supposed to be sailing in the St Barth's Bucket Race on March 24th," he wrote. That's right: the writer of "My Generation", "Substitute" and "Won't Get Fooled Again" now spends part of his time as a yachtsman in the Caribbean. "This was arranged last August," he added. "In a challenging coincidence Roger Daltrey will be performing 'Tommy' on that very day for Teenage Cancer [Trust] at the Royal Albert Hall."

More than most rock stars, Townshend notices what is going on in the world, and he felt he was meeting the challenge in the only decent way he could. "In these straitened and tragic times I have decided I have to do something useful rather than try to enjoy myself on a yacht while so many people are in trouble, and I am going to see Roger today at his rehearsal studio to offer my services in some way. I hope I will be able to perform with him, possibly sing 'Acid Queen' as I did when The Who played at Woodstock."

Daltrey wasn't sure. He had already announced that "Tommy" would be played by a new bunch of musicians, which meant no place for Townshend on his own rock opera about the "deaf, dumb and blind kid" who turned out to be both a mean pinball player and a misappropriated seer, a concept that has sold 20m records.

"I offered to perform," Townshend wrote the next day, "but Roger and I agreed in the end that it might be best for him to do his show alone, just to properly test the new model..." Later, he expanded. "Our manager Bill [Curbishley] says that this is a safe place for this experiment. Like doing a run-through in our living room. I know Roger is nervous, but I went to his rehearsal yesterday and his musicians are superb, calm, and will provide the musical support he needs."

I wondered if I was a silent witness to the break-up of one of rock's greatest bands. But the following day, at 6.46am, >

PORTRAITS *ULI WEBER*

> this landed: "Dear Simon, Roger changed his mind. He has now agreed I can walk on and play 'Acid Queen' solo. Things change every day at the moment. He is extremely distracted, and of course very busy as usual at this time. – Pete"

Four hours later, this: "I'm definitely back on again. Doing 'Acid Queen' and 'Baba O'Riley'...come if you can."

A week or two earlier I had spent a few hours at Townshend's home in Richmond, discussing the world of a rock star in the late afternoon of an explosive career. The conversations had ranged from his attitude towards fans ("there is something very strange about them"), his time as an editor at Faber & Faber ("I don't think P.D. James liked me at all") and his current reading matter, a horticultural monthly ("I subscribe to the idea that as you get older you should try to make a garden"). We also discussed his arrest in 2003 for giving his credit card details to an online company that traded in indecent photographs. But we began by talking about the memoir he has been working on for years.

He has reached the first performance of "Tommy" in 1969. "A lot of my friends who were journalists turned against me," he says. "They said, 'this is sick, this idea. You've gone too far, Pete. It's unforgivable because you're smart and we trusted you.' They didn't like the idea of a deaf, dumb and blind boy playing pinball. There was outrage." The band tried to win them round by showcasing the album at Ronnie Scott's in London. "We played it very very loud and also gave away lots of free booze. Needless to say, we got a standing ovation."

Townshend's memoir, which, at 80,000 words, is "about a third" done, is provisionally entitled "Pete Townshend: Who He?" Recently he was walking to lunch, along the Thames from his house, when another name suggested itself. A man on a park bench clutching a can of lager asked him, "Are you Pete Townshend?" He confirmed that he was. "Effing legend!" the drinker replied, and now Townshend is considering that for the book title instead. But what sort of effing legend is he?

FIRST OF ALL, a very British one. He was born in west London in May 1945, right at the end of the war in Europe. His parents were show people – his mother a singer, his father a saxophonist in the Squadronaires, the Royal Air Force big band. Pete's formative years were spent at Ealing Art College, where he was inspired by Larry Rivers, a "saxophone-playing, heroin-addicted gay lunatic", the auto-destructive artist Gustav Metzger (the inspiration behind his guitar-smashing) and the writer David Mercer, whose play "The Generations" inspired the title "My Generation". "He was an incredibly impressive speaker. He said, 'Once you're on the left, you have to stay there whatever happens. I don't care if you become a fucking billionaire – stay there!' And I've always kept that in mind."

The Who as we know them came into being in 1964, and soon became the most powerful, iconic and humorous emblem of the Mod movement. But their scope would extend far beyond a fashionable subculture. On stage, they were all you could hope for in a rock band: brutally arresting, unnervingly unpredictable and blisteringly loud. Then as now, pop music was dependent on a character-led plot to thrive, and The Who offered much. There were Daltrey's Tarzan acrobatics with a swinging microphone, and the raw emotion in his voice, ranging from angelic yearning to a raging throttle. There was the bassist John Entwistle's prowling menace, the traditional "quiet one" turned dangerous uncle. There were Townshend's scything windmills of excitement and improbable leaps, vividly illustrating the visceral force of his songs. And then there was Keith Moon, a complex public lunatic, who lived as he drummed, with every complex flaw on brazen display. On their best nights, such as the one captured on the album "Live at Leeds" in 1970, the crowd witnessed a type of bombastic heist, an excessively glorious musical offence.

ON STAGE IN THE SEVENTIES, THE WHO WERE ALL YOU COULD HOPE FOR IN A ROCK BAND: ARRESTING, UNNERVING AND BLISTERINGLY LOUD

But every party brings its dawn. Moon died of an overdose in 1978, Entwistle from a drug-induced heart attack in 2002. Daltrey has struggled with throat lesions, while Townshend wears a hearing aid (can you imagine being Pete Townshend's ears? The fields of the Crimea may have put up with less). The band thrived on tension, and it is still there decades later. It is there in Townshend's songwriting, a howl of displacement and uncertain identity. Never has a band's name been more apt. His songs are often touching and tender, but there is deep anger too. A plaintive lyric is often underpinned with ferocious music. You cannot remain passive when listening to The Who. Less hedonistic than the Rolling Stones, their best songs are passionate incitements to action; they enter your life and never dim. No other stadium rock band has managed this feat so consistently or so well.

Townshend has long felt a sense of duty, partly to his audience, partly to himself. He may have analysed his role in the firmament more than any other star, and he has been criticised for it, notably by Keith Richards, who implored him to think less and play his guitar more. "I can offer comfort and momentary distraction," Townshend wrote in an e-mail earlier this year. "And yet in my fictions (from 'Tommy' onwards) the leading characters often claim to have a way forward. Dys- >

Alive and leaping
Townshend's famous leap captured at Leeds university on February 14th 1970, the night The Who recorded "Live at Leeds". The photographer, John Rettie, was a 20-year-old amateur, reading civil engineering and working for the student paper

"THERE'S A SENSE OF BEING IN FRONT OF A BUNCH OF FANS WHO REALLY WANT TO SEE YOU FIGHT ON STAGE, OR SCOWL AT EACH OTHER. THEY WANT TO BE THERE WHEN YOU DIE"

> topian or utopian, it makes very little difference in the game I play – as long as you can dance for a moment…the credibility of such work will rarely stand close scrutiny. I tend to create thin plots into which the listener can interpolate themselves, and travel with the music. This is neither my voice, nor Roger's. It is often the voice of someone who is quite mad in fact." He sees The Who now as "a kind of celebration machine".

And then there's the tension between Townshend and Daltrey. (Whose band is it really? Who dominates the stage?) "You know, it's survived. My marriage to my wife has not survived, and my marriage to Roger has survived, and it might be that only one of them could."

Daltrey once told me: "I don't care when people say we're not getting on – it's not fucking important. All that matters is what exists on stage and in our music. In that music is our relationship, is our love. He forgives all my foibles, and I forgive all his, and underneath all that I love him dearly."

These days Townshend thinks he detects an air of disappointment when they play live. "There's a sense of being in front of a bunch of fans who really want to see you fight on stage, or scowl at each other, or die. They want to be there when you die." I question this, but he remains convinced. "It's the same with Mick and Keith. If tomorrow Mick Jagger would say, 'That's it, the Stones are finished,' then people would look at him as being a completely different artist, and a different kind of human being. But why would you want to buy something by Mick? Actually what we really want is to observe him going through the agony of being on stage with Keith Richards on a bad night."

I mention the success of Richards's memoir. "The point is," Townshend says, "when we read Keith Richards's book, are we really reading who he is? James Fox [Richards's ghost] is a brilliant writer. I think it's sad that we will only remember Keith's book because of what he said about the size of Mick's [apparently modest] genitals. Which, by the way, to use an apt term, is bollocks. I've seen them, and they are not small. And it is not just the balls that are big."

Townshend's house has what must be one of the finest unspoilt private views in London. From his huge conservatory he can see the Thames snake by; the land falls away from a balcony much as it must have done in Henry VIII's time. Townshend spends most of his day in this room, not least because his variable mood is lifted by the flood of light. The house was once owned by the actor John Mills, and later by the guitarist Ron Wood; the Stones' song "It's Only Rock'n'Roll (But I Like It)" was written here. The walls are covered not with guitars or gold discs, but with Francis Bacon lithographs.

I first met Townshend in 1985, not long after he had begun working at the publishers Faber & Faber. We went for lunch at the local trattoria, and I asked him about the early days of The Who, and how badly they'd been ripped off. He told me of a humiliating showdown with the venal American accountant Allen Klein in 1977. Townshend had emerged from their encounter with about $1m, a fraction of what he thought he was due. What happened next formed the opening of his song "Who Are You?", in which he was found drunk in a Soho doorway by a policeman. After the meeting with Klein he went to the Speakeasy Club, where he met two members of the Sex Pistols. "I remember thinking, 'OK, the fucking revolution has arrived'," Townshend said. " 'Maybe this money is going to be important to me, maybe this is the end. Maybe this is the last money I'm ever going to make.' Part of me of course wanted that to be true, because the more deeply I got involved in it, the more I thought how much this business really stinks, and everything attached to it stinks, and I hate it, and I want to get out." (Thanks to the supertax of the Sixties, Townshend only became wealthy late in his career. Or as he observes laconically, "It's really only been since The Who have stopped making records that I've actually made any money.")

His job at Faber coincided with the longest fallow period in his musical career, 1982-89, when he believed The Who were no longer relevant. He was brought in to work on "books that are about now", mainly photography and pop culture. He had some experience: his publishing company Eel Pie produced good books on Bowie and The Clash, and for a while he had run a bookshop in Richmond. He did two or three days a

week at Faber, lots of lunches, and got to know Harold Pinter, Ted Hughes and the young Kazuo Ishiguro.

We didn't keep in touch, but I kept going to The Who's concerts, which were reliably triumphant; you'd need a steel heart not to be stirred by both their conviction and their durability. Townshend worked on semi-autobiographical narrative solo albums too, including "White City" and "Psychoderelict", but for some reason the band remained a vital force; they seemed better in their 50s and 60s than in their 40s. Perhaps they were more relaxed; perhaps, as younger musicians came through who were inspired by them, they felt more accepted.

I got to know Townshend again five years ago, when the band were about to release their 11th, and by current reckoning final, studio album, "Endless Wire". This was a crashing, often angry record with a few great tracks (not least "A Man in a Purple Dress", with which Townshend attacked the pomposity of religious paraphernalia). It sold respectably, reaching the top ten in Britain and America, but as the tour to promote it travelled from city to city, more and more new songs fell away, leaving what people had really come to hear, which was the songs written more than 30 years before. "After John Entwistle died, Roger and I felt very exposed, but in an extremely good way," Townshend said. "We felt, 'Oh wow, things are clearer: you sing, I write'."

As he says this, his Yorkshire terrier Wistle appears, followed by Rachel Fuller, Townshend's partner for 14 years. They met when Fuller, 28 years his junior, was working as a string arranger for another musician in the studios where The Who were rehearsing for a tour of "Quadrophenia". "I saw her across a crowded room...she was like a beam. I left a note for her, but I think the girl who was working at reception fancied me and threw it away." Quizzed about this later, Townshend admits that it may have been wishful thinking: "I will live in fantasy...this is now so much a part of my job that I couldn't break the habit even if I wanted to."

For a time, after separating from his wife in the mid-1990s, he couldn't envisage building another long-term relationship (he has three children from his marriage, which lasted 26 years). "I saw myself doing a bit of an Eric [Clapton], playing the field. You know, 'I'll just have about 500 lovers'. I think I'd maybe had about ten girlfriends at that time. Eric was always going on about his 5,500. Even Tony Blackburn had 5,000. And I very quickly realised it wouldn't work for me."

Rachel, an accomplished singer-songwriter as well as an arranger, offers chocolate cake, which Townshend declines for weight reasons. "I've got a wonderful room at the top of this house," he says. "The room where Mary Hayley Bell wrote 'Whistle Down the Wind'. It would make a great studio, and so I set things up, thinking it would be lovely just to sit in there and play my new keyboard, but it's that extra flight of stairs, and I think 'Fuck it, I'm not going up there'."

I say that every climb might deprive him of the energy to write another song, the way Woody Allen claimed that every time Balzac had an orgasm it deprived him of a novel.

"I've tried all that," Townshend says. "No orgasm before a show, orgasm before a show..."

Any difference?

"Nah. Nothing."

Townshend's conversation ranges from the lives of the artists on his walls to the comparative merits of Scandinavian crime novelists. He was keen on the Mass Observation diaries I had edited for a series of books, proclaiming himself to be "absolutely in love" with one of the diarists, an indomitable Scottish female civil servant making ends meet at the end of the second world war. He says he was recently approached by Faber about his autobiography, but he feels they won't be able to pay the sort of advance that will reward his years of work. I wondered if the book would contain much mention of his arrest in 2003. "I kind of dread it, but yes. The thing that's really difficult is to do it without taking an overly defensive stance on it."

A few years ago, Townshend had given me the first cogent, and I believe truthful, account of his ordeal. He had recognised himself in a newspaper report as the "famous >

> rock star" the police were about to question as part of an investigation into child pornography called Operation Ore. "There were two things that went through my mind," he said. "One was that I don't deserve to be on the front of any tabloid newspaper. And two, this is gross hypocrisy that I'm obviously going to be sacrificed. So for a moment I thought 'There's just no point trying to continue.' Luckily, Rachel was next to me when I read the paper. I turned to her and said, 'Fuck, this is the end,' and she said, 'No, it isn't. Let's go and make a few phone calls...' "

Townshend's defence has been widely assumed to be "research" for the book he was writing. The full story is more complicated than that, and more proactive. He now talks of being "psychologically triggered", perhaps by abusive experiences when he was young. "I had the sense that there was some stuff in my childhood that was difficult and strange, but I couldn't remember it. I'd spoken to a few therapists who said, 'If you'd been abused you would remember it – you wouldn't have blacked it out.' Although one therapist did say, 'What you could have blacked out is some abuse that you enjoyed, or that empowered you in any way'."

The first four years of his life had been "almost paradise". But his mother was having an affair, and Townshend was taken down to Westgate-on-Sea in Kent to spend two "dark" years with his grandmother. "She turned out to be clinically insane and very abusive," Townshend told me – "this loon grandmother who walked around naked under her fur coat and tried to shag bus conductors." Some of this experience formed the basis of "Tommy", and later there would be other repercussions, not least Townshend's almost maniacal devotion to charity work. "I needed to give back, give back, give back," he says. "I felt guilty about my success, I felt uncomfortable about how easily I had been delivered this extraordinary life that I had."

THE HARDEST THING ABOUT HIS ARREST WAS "JUST THE ABSOLUTE INJUSTICE OF IT". BUT HE ALSO DESCRIBES WHAT HE DID AS "AN ARROGANT ACT"

After seeking counselling for alcoholism in the 1990s, Townshend became convinced that he had to stop writing cheques and get more involved in campaigns. He says he was outraged at how easy it was to obtain paedophilic images online, and he wanted to do something about it. In May 1999 he spent $7 to join an illegal site, for which he now offers this explanation. "I believed at the time that my research was within the law, which was subsequently hardened up and made retroactive. My intention in 1999 was to show that my credit-card bank was processing money for illegal porn without question, on a clearly labelled site (that I suspected was probably a sting, and thus felt I would hurt no real victims). And that's all it was about. And I did it once. I didn't go into the site. I used my credit card, then immediately cancelled it, and forgot about it."

The police investigation into his activity lasted almost five months. "I shouldn't really have accepted a caution," he says now. "I hadn't done anything. They came to this house, they came to my office, my studio, my storeroom, they took away 11 computers and sat on them doing forensic examination for five months, and that whole time I was thinking, 'I'm fucked. All they have to do is just flood one of the computers with images and nobody's going to believe me'. "

They found nothing, but Townshend's reputation was damaged, perhaps irreparably. Last year, when The Who were about to play for a television audience of 100m at the Super Bowl in Miami, he was targeted by family-rights groups and other protesters. "It is hanging over me," he says. "I think there's a divide in how people perceive me. There are some people that know me and know enough about my past to know this is the kind of thing I would do, but without salacious intent, and that I would never abuse a child. Years before, I admitted to managing to save my marriage by the occasional use of pornography on the road, particularly if I was feeling emotionally vulnerable – pornography would be a way of surviving on the oil rig of the rock'n'roll road. I received dozens of letters from people saying 'we know who you are, and you can come and babysit our kids any time'. [He also received vociferous support from Roger Daltrey.] Then there are people on the other side of the line who just don't know. I was just terrified of the newspapers. I thought, 'If I don't accept this caution, they're going to come after me'."

The hardest thing "was just the fucking absolute injustice of it". But he also describes what he did as "an arrogant act. I felt inviolable. But I do think I needed to experience it, in a humbling way." Later he adds, "I look back at my life and I don't see any incidence [sic] where I've done anything wrong. I've never touched a child, I've never beaten anybody up, well I've had a few fist fights. A few televisions out of windows, maybe had sex with a girl or two who was a little bit too young by modern standards."

The day after we last discussed the issue, Townshend elaborated in another e-mail. "My creative work continues, more positively than ever. But I have to admit that at 66 years old, of all the things I have achieved in my life, I am most proud of the work I have done – mostly behind the scenes – to help establish and run innovative systems of rehabilitation and support for what society tends to see as its human failures, and help them to prevail and survive with dignity." A little later, in yet another e-mail, he added: "It seems strange >

> now to try to make what I did seem sensible and rational. It seems nuts looking back."

His artistic output is still vibrant, but his ambitions are realistic. He is working on another long-form piece called "Floss", for which he has written about 40 segments and is currently reinforcing the narrative. But will anyone hear it? In the age of iTunes, when we buy individual tracks with a click, the notion of a story-led album seems whimsically outdated. "I'm finding it very difficult to change," Townshend says. "I've been through phases where I've wanted to get on a plane and kill Steve Jobs."

Much of his work goes on The Who's heritage. He has just finished organising his archive, a vast trove of instruments and recording equipment, alongside journals, books, clothes and crates of ephemera. He still has unopened fan letters from the 1960s, and every so often he opens one. "There are offers of marriage from little 14-year-old Japanese girls wearing a kimono."

Townshend used to feel, "like David Cassidy", he was being buried under so much fan mail that he could never process it. Most of it came from "maybe 400 people" who wrote regularly. They still do. How does he feel about them? "I don't like fans really. But that's because they're my employer – I don't like the boss. I feel much happier about the record company giving me a load of money to piss away rather than someone coming up to me in the street saying, 'I saw you in Blah Blah Blah and you were really great – when are you going to do another tour?' It feels to me like, you know, 'When are you going to put in a decent sink, or whatever it is that you do?'

"Of course, without them I wouldn't exist. But fans are fanatics, obsessives. In a Freudian sense there is something very strange about them, a degree of obsession, and neither of you really know what the transaction is about. If it's a female who is determined to overthrow your partner and marry you, you have to send them a severe warning shot, and take some responsibility that you may have played a part at some point, either consciously or unconsciously. I've had death threats and all kinds of things. Because of the backdrop of John Lennon [being murdered by a fan], followed up by George Harrison getting stabbed in his own house, you keep an eye on what it is that you think that you represent to people."

How Townshend represents himself is clearly uppermost in his mind. His frequent e-mails after our interviews – revising and expanding his thoughts and stories, sometimes to the point of contradiction – suggest a desire not only to get things right, but also to clarify in his own mind precisely what it is he is trying to say. Like the attention of his fans, this borders on the obsessive. I keep being reminded of The Who's emblematic first single, "I Can't Explain".

He tries to maintain a life without bodyguards, and to walk around freely with his partner and children. "But if you go somewhere like Disneyland, people will think that you are part of the facilities that Disneyland are laying on."

Naturally, the attention is gradually declining. In January I saw the show at Hammersmith Apollo in London at which The Who played a few songs alongside Debbie Harry and Jeff Beck to raise money for photodynamic therapy, a promising cancer treatment. One reason I was there was because I thought the appearance could be The Who's last.

"Your intuition was dead on. At the beginning of the year I had decided, '66 next birthday, I think I'll just stop'. Nothing to do with my hearing, because I think I can sort that out on stage. My feeling was that I simply didn't have the enthusiasm to do reinvention."

"THERE IS SOMETHING VERY STRANGE ABOUT FANS. NEITHER OF YOU REALLY KNOW WHAT THE TRANSACTION IS ABOUT"

What, then, has changed that? "I think the same thing that has made me decide to finish my book. I look around me and I think, 'Why aren't I suffering the way that other people are suffering? Is it just that I don't have to worry about paying the school fees?' I think for me it's that if you can take an artistic position and do something useful, even if it's negative, then action is the best answer.

"I always thought that The Who would be very brief, and that I would shut it down after a while and sit in my apartment in Soho making kinetic sculptures. I'd say I've been in stasis for quite a long time – and the word means either perpetual motion or perpetual stillness. I've been whirling on the spot for quite a long time."

He now wonders whether his creativity wouldn't have been better served by never being in a band at all. "The thing about The Who for me, and this is sad in a way, is the amount of control that I've had to have, keeping the creative process close to my chest, making sure the other guys in the band felt they were part of the process but they really weren't."

These days he feels burdened by another responsibility. "If I'm out on the road with Roger and he's as miserable as sin, there is a bit of me, and I know my manager Bill Curbishley shares this, which thinks 'Why are we doing this to him?' He seems to be so unhappy, he seems to be so unfulfilled. Yet when you talk to him he exalts The Who to high heaven, and exalts me. He always says it's going to be fabulous, and 'this time I'm just going to have fun,' and he always ends up distraught, sobbing in a corner somewhere, saying 'That was the

The two
Townshend guesting with Roger Daltrey, Albert Hall, March 2011

worst show I've ever done and I could do so much better and I can't work out how I'm going to do this again'."

Townshend finds the opposite experience. I asked him whether it was a chore playing the big hits repeatedly on stage. "It's so fucking amazing," he said, "but [playing live] seems to require no energy. It's not that I'm fed up with it or blasé about it, I'm amazed by it, but at the same time I feel I have so little to do with it. For me it's just become easier and easier, to the point where I can push a switch and this incredible U2/Bruce Springsteen crusher emerges, and we start playing and I just think, bring it on! Do a gig before or after us, toss a coin, I don't care if we go on before you or after you, if you play on the same night as The Who, you are dead!"

At the Albert Hall at the end of March, Daltrey and his new band were a quarter of the way through "Tommy" when Townshend walked on, unannounced, with an acoustic guitar. He was wearing what he wore for the pictures on these pages – a dark suit and a checked shirt, with a large red handkerchief that leapt from his breast pocket like a ship's flare. The show had been moving along steadily, but Townshend's appearance, for "Acid Queen", ignited the hall. He appeared again in the encore, this time with his red Fender for "Baba O'Riley", and the place came alive once more.

After the show, I found him in his dressing room with Rachel Fuller, sitting upright, as if at an official tea ceremony. He appeared slightly removed from the experience; he still had his jacket on, and had barely broken sweat. Opposite him lay 24 small bottles of water and some pastries, untouched. Along the corridor, Daltrey and the band were making some noise. Townshend said he had enjoyed watching the majority of the concert from a box, and was pleased that his creation still held up. But he was clearly a rock star at the end of something, and he couldn't be sure what was coming next. ■

A social revolution

Women in China have long been silenced or sidelined – if they weren't smothered at birth. But now a booming economy has transformed their lives. Hilary Spurling, biographer of the first woman to tell the world about Chinese home life, talks to young women in Nanjing and sees the changes for herself

"IMPOSSIBLE IS NOTHING," said my Chinese host in March, when I told her the English proverb "you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear". She had just passed me a plateful of what looked like tiny, shiny, caramel-and-white striped silk purses. They turned out to be sliced pig's ear, one of many traditional delicacies at a banquet that included fried ants, sea slugs and geese feet.

Of course almost nothing is impossible in a country where acrobats still juggle wooden chairs as if they were feathers or ping-pong balls – and where the gristle and cartilage of a pig's ear turn up on your plate as an absurdly elegant appetiser. What makes foreigners gasp and stretch their eyes in China now is the almost inconceivable speed and scale of the changes that, in the past ten years, have swept people off the land like a giant magnet. In 1990 three out of every four people still lived and worked, as they always had done, on farms. More than 40% have now moved to the cities. By 2015, according to an article I read in *China Daily*, based on a United Nations forecast, half the population will be urbanised.

The creative energy released by this frenetic development is palpable almost as soon as you step off the plane. It comes like a buzz off the people, especially the young women. When I arrived in the university town of Nanjing on my first visit to China in 2007, I spent days on end watching and talking to students, marvelling above all at the confidence, competence and poise of the girls. I was working on a book about Pearl Buck, who grew up in the Chinese countryside before teaching on the Nanjing campus in the 1920s, so I knew a lot >

> about the world of these girls' grandmothers: a slow-moving world where traffic went by river steamer or canal boat, and the only wheeled vehicle most people ever saw was a wheelbarrow. Girls were shut up at home on reaching puberty with no further access to the outside world, and no voice in their own or their family's affairs. In traditional households they were forbidden to speak even to their husbands, except behind closed doors in the bedroom at night.

I'VE BEEN FASCINATED by China all my life. The only two books I remember from early childhood were both Chinese. One was a collection of watercolours by Yui Shufang, "Chinese Children at Play". It showed small boys with shaven heads and girls with black pigtails playing games I'd never heard of, and wearing clothes unlike any I'd ever seen. They had patterned tops and brightly coloured trousers: the sort of clothes children wear worldwide today, but I was a wartime child, and in England in the 1940s we mostly wore grey flannel skirts or shorts and plain drab hand-knits. This was my first picture-book, and I was entranced by it. The second was a storybook read aloud to me by my mother before I could read myself. "The Chinese Children Next Door" was about a family of six little girls who wanted a baby brother so badly that in the end their wish came true. The seventh child was a boy, the answer to his parents' prayer, the pet and plaything of his elder sisters.

Both books bit deep and hard into my imagination. It was only years later, when I'd already started work on a Chinese book myself, that I came across the story that had meant so much to me as an episode in Pearl Buck's memoirs, and realised that she was the author. "The Chinese Children Next Door" is a fictionalised version of the experience of her much older adoptive Chinese sister, a girl abandoned as a baby by her family and brought up as their own by Pearl's parents. This sister was already a married woman with the first of six daughters by the time Pearl was born, and the two little girls grew up as best friends, witnessing the almost uncontrollable rage of the Chinese grandfather at a daughter-in-law who, year after year, produced only girls.

I knew "The Chinese Children Next Door" by heart as a child, probably because it echoed the much sadder stories my mother told me about her own early years, when she too was the youngest of six unwanted girls. Her mother finally managed, at her seventh try, to produce the boy who was all she and her husband had ever wanted in the first place. "My life was ruined when I was two," my mother said. As a child I must have recognised, at any rate subconsciously, the harsh unspoken truths lurking between the lines of a story that made my mother's early unhappiness somehow easier to bear. When Jawaharlal Nehru read Buck's captivating tale aloud to Mahatma Gandhi on his sick-bed, both men burst out laughing. Like Buck, they were only too familiar with the realities of a world where female infanticide, domestic slavery and sexual bondage were commonplace.

I KNEW "THE CHINESE CHILDREN NEXT DOOR" BY HEART AS A CHILD... IT ECHOED THE MUCH SADDER STORIES MY MOTHER TOLD ME ABOUT HER OWN LIFE AS THE YOUNGEST OF SIX UNWANTED GIRLS

EDUCATION AND EARNING power have given the female descendants of that world independence in the past decade, and with it the self-reliance that comes from an unprecedented measure of control over their own lives. For the young women I met in Nanjing and Shanghai, even the draconian one-child policy of the last 30 years has an aspect of liberation. They looked blank when I asked about sex discrimination. "For some reason my parents wanted a boy as well as me," one of them said, laughing. Her family had managed to get permission for a second child on the grounds that the first – my informant – had a fatal heart defect. Her mother was already pregnant again when a neighbour informed the family-planning office that the grounds for the permit were fake, so the baby had to be aborted.

All of them assured me that nowadays no one was treated differently on grounds of gender; but older people insisted that you have to pay attention to how people behave, not what they say. The arrival of a baby boy is greeted with celebration, the birth of a girl with condolence. Official statistics say that newborn boys outnumber girls by 118 to 100 in spite of the fact that, according to my friends, boys cost more. Parents have to start saving to buy a house or a flat for a son from the day of his birth, because no man has a hope of marrying unless he can provide a home for his bride – and girls can afford to be increasingly picky these days, in this as in much else.

All this turns the rural society of the last 2,000 years and more upside down. "Low culture, small knowledge," another Chinese friend said scornfully, describing the villages in poor western parts of the country where girls are still expendable, and the one-child rule is so irregularly enforced that a large family of sons remains many mothers' ambition. On my first visit, four years ago, I took a trip up the Yangzi, from Nanjing to the Lu mountains, in one of the big comfortable well-equipped coaches packed with Chinese tourists exploring their own country for the first time in history. It took eight hours, and I watched seven films screened one after another at the front of the bus: gangster mov-

DAVID HOGSHOLT

ies, hoodlum fantasies, heroic or comedy thrillers, historical romances set in an imperial past where corrupt magistrates connived with rapacious landlords to oppress the locals. All of them blurred after a bit into a violent continuum of fist fights, knife fights, sword fights, sensational chases and gun battles punctuated by shots, grunts and thuds. Above and behind the male mayhem we heard the perpetual high screams or subdued moaning of women being beaten, tortured and raped.

Girls have not been routinely crippled by their mothers since the abolition of foot-binding almost a century ago, but in the villages many still die at birth by the traditional methods of stifling or strangulation. Their fate, and the mindset that makes it possible, were uncovered by Xinran in the 1990s when she was a young Chinese radio reporter based on the banks of the Yellow River, and she explored them for the first time in detail in her latest book, "Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother" (2010). Xinran's initial contact with village life was a shock for which nothing in her urban background had prepared her, and one that reverberates through all her books. When she travelled the length and breadth of China in 2006, some of the interviews she conducted reduced even her Chinese cameraman to horrified incredulity.

Many of the stories people told Xinran were not essentially different from the accounts Pearl Buck had listened to as a young woman 70 or 80 years earlier. Born in 1892, Buck grew up hearing a distinctive noise: the low urgent monotone of Chinese women explaining their problems to her mother, who had been instructed, as a newly arrived and very young American missionary, to set up a women's Bible class. Buck's mother decided almost at once that Christian conversion was the last thing these people needed. From then on her Bible class functioned as an unofficial clinic, dispensing practical advice and a listening ear to women who had never been listened to by anyone before. When Pearl in turn inherited the class, its members talked to her as freely and frankly as they had done to her mother.

"She eschewed ideology; she avoided taking sides; she steered clear of experts and officials," says Leslie T. Chang, whose own graphic reporting of women's lives in China today relies on precisely this lack of prejudice, along with intuitive sympathy and close attention. "Pearl Buck's understanding of the country was built on years of patient observation, living in backwater cities and befriending students, housewives, servants and farmers." Listening to ordinary people, and recording clearly and accurately what they say, form the basis of Chang's "Factory Girls" (2008) as of all Xinran's books.

Of course things have moved on since Buck's day. Starvation is no longer endemic in the countryside. Girls are not commonly driven to suicide by implacable mothers-in-law, nor sold into slavery or exchanged for food in time of famine. Even the villages now have television and telephones. But rural society is still constricted by isolation and hardship, by lack of prospects and, for women, by dread of conceiving a baby girl.

THE REALITIES OF ordinary lives are no more up for discussion in China now than they were then. Buck's account of a farming family in "The Good Earth" was widely attacked for its frankness when it came out in 1931. My biography of Buck has, I'm told, been severely cut in the Chinese edition: certainly it looks surprisingly slim. Chang's book, published in the West in 2008, has yet to appear on the Chinese mainland. Xinran's books have long been officially banned although, when the *Guardian* named her one of the world's top 100 women on International Women's Day in March, Beijing finally authorised the circulation of all but one of them in English translation.

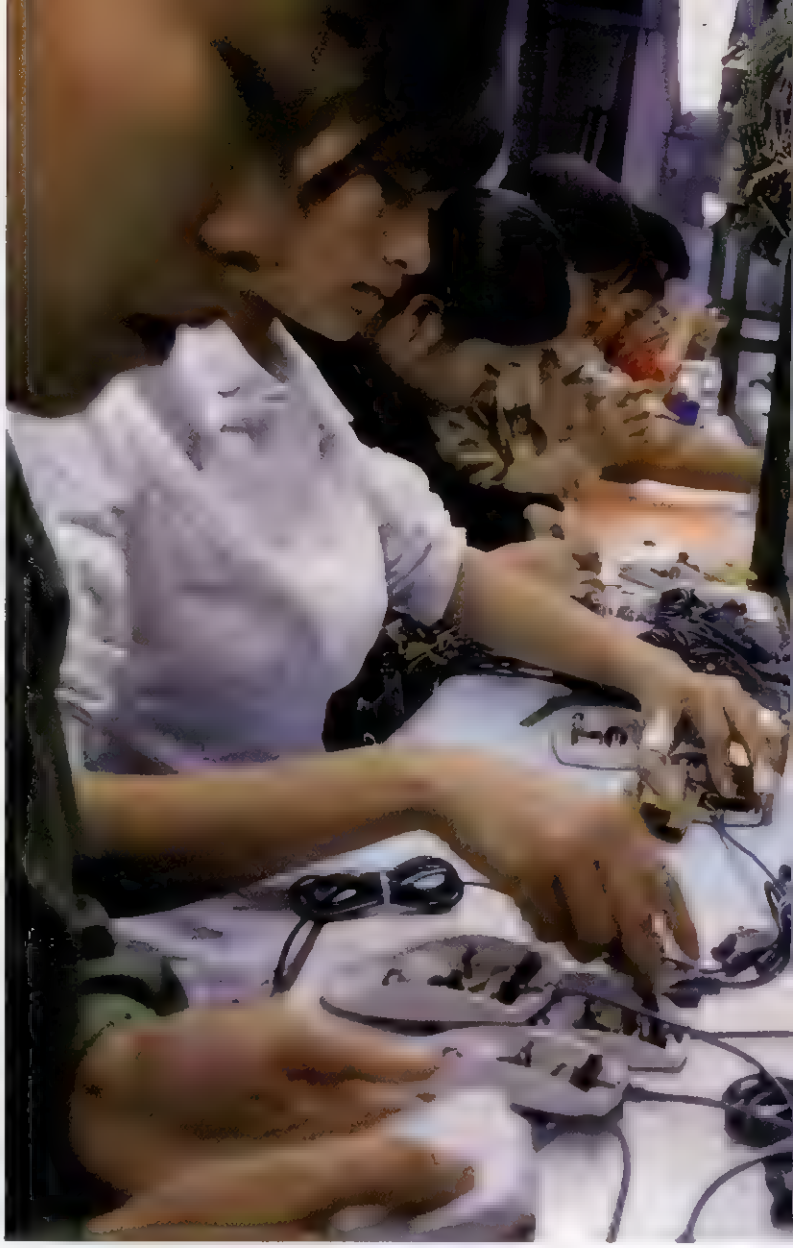
Whether or not the women Xinran interviewed will ever read their own stories in print is another question. As a reporter in the 1990s she found people in the villages incuri->

> ous, mute, reluctant to acknowledge the presence of a woman, let alone to answer her questions. Even in the towns she met with stubborn resistance. "The Chinese stood up against me," she says. "They had never heard of the Cultural Revolution. They'd never heard of poverty in the countryside. Why was I trying to make them lose face?" I found the same attitude again and again in today's students, who couldn't see the point of deliberately stirring up their country's history.

The past played no part in Chang's conversations with the factory girls who had migrated from their villages to operate the assembly lines that produce the clothes we wear, the computer parts we need, the shoes, hats, handbags, games and gadgets that make the Western world go round. They work up to 13 hours a day, live in cold, dirty, overcrowded dormitories and eat poor food. They have no free time, health insurance, holidays or pension provision beyond the paltry state minimum. Three years ago their average wage was between 500 and 800 yuan – roughly £50-80 – a month. Today, a shortage of labour means that young women in their 20s, the elite of the migrant workforce, can earn three times as much, or more.

They return to their villages at New Year bearing gifts: anoraks, trainers, sweets and toys for the children, pretty jackets for their mothers. They also inject unprecedented sums of money into the rural economy. Young unmarried women now subsidise their parents, pay for the education of younger brothers and sisters, distribute handouts to elderly relatives, and command growing respect from the village as well as from their families. Some go back home to settle, bringing capital and know-how. A friend told me about her female cousin who returned to farm the land in the village where their grandparents lived in a mud house with paper windows. People like this are beginning to put up glass-and-stone two-storey houses in the country, conspicuous proof of an alien world of development and enterprise. Factory girls may look victimised to outsiders, who take them to be helpless, ill-paid and insecure, easy prey to sexual and financial exploitation, stuck on the lowest and most vulnerable level of society. "But that's not how they see themselves," says Chang. In their own eyes they are proud, resourceful, energetic risk-takers at the cutting edge of a social revolution.

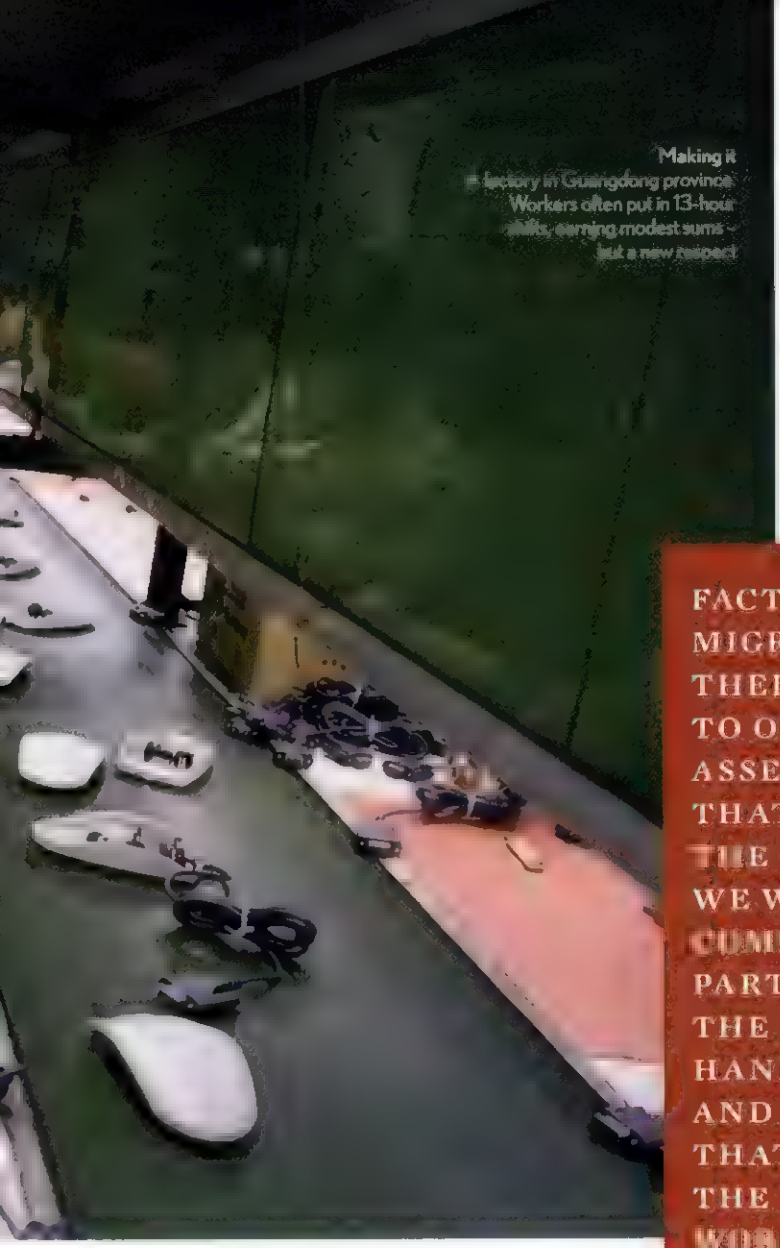
I OVERLAPPED WITH Xinran and Chang on the eastern book-festival circuit in March, spending nearly a week with Xinran in Dubai, following Chang into Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai. Listening to them talk about their books, and talking myself about mine, I realised for the first time how directly our subjects interlinked, and how, underlying the relentless change in China, there is much continuity. The first stories Buck wrote were about change, modernity, the seismic shifts already beginning to crack the country apart in the opening decades of the 20th century. She saw water come from the tap for the first time in 1900, and watched the first train come roaring out of a tunnel in the



hill outside her home town of Zhenjiang four years later. Her parents had known the place as a sleepy market town before it became a foreign treaty port, a rich and expansive trading centre strategically positioned where the Yangzi meets the Grand Canal, in those days China's main north-south traffic artery. The region still produces fish, rice, silk and tea, but, with the coming of roads, Zhenjiang dropped back into the sticks.

This year, some of its inhabitants told me with satisfaction, it finally tore down the last of its old houses. It has become a featureless provincial town, full of the kind of suburban shop fronts and drab apartment blocks familiar worldwide now that we all wear the same Chinese-made T-shirts, jeans and trainers, drive the same brands of car, and organise our lives in the same way by mobile phone. As I walked along the broad new embankment at twilight, I watched an aeroplane hanging against the pale sky. I did not realise, until I found it still there on my way back half an hour later, that it was a stationary paper kite – the contemporary equivalent of the flying pagodas I loved as a child in "Chinese Children at Play".

I visited the school where Buck taught in 1915-16, now



Making it
A factory in Guangdong province. Workers often put in 13-hour shifts, earning modest sums – but a new respect

FACTORY GIRLS MIGRATE FROM THEIR VILLAGES TO OPERATE THE ASSEMBLY LINES THAT PRODUCE THE CLOTHES WE WEAR, THE COMPUTER PARTS WE NEED, THE SHOES, HANDBAGS AND GAMES THAT MAKE THE WESTERN WORLD GO ROUND

the Pearl S. Buck Middle School. Her students, all boys, were eager and hungry, starved of information even more than food. Today the school is mixed, but the intake still comes from poor families who could not otherwise afford education. One boy wanted to be a writer. One girl was so tense her lips moved all through my talk as she rehearsed, repeatedly, the question she planned to ask me in English. Another boy, falling over his words in a rush to get them out, explained that he had never spoken to a foreigner before, and it made him so nervous that he hoped I wouldn't be angry. These teenagers, like all the students I met, wanted to know what Buck had done for their country, how I rated her books, and what I thought of her translations from the Chinese.

Buck's books were banned under Mao, and she herself was classified a Public Enemy, guilty of peddling cultural imperialist lies. On my first visit to Zhenjiang four years ago, research in any normal sense seemed impossible. "It's been too long, and no people want to talk about Pearl Buck," I was told firmly. The house she lived in as a child had been destroyed, her mother's grave was now buried under a housing development. Even the names of the people she knew locally had been removed from the Chinese edition of her memoirs.

Her slow rehabilitation speeded up just over a year ago when she was ranked, with government approval, one of the Top International Friends of China. Now there is a museum in her name, as well as the school whose pupils are learning to re-evaluate her. These children are more fortunate than their parents and grandparents. Many, perhaps most, will go on to university. I'm told that even people earning the basic subsistence wage of three yuan a day reckon to spend one on food, one on rent and a third on education. Schooling is tough and ferociously competitive for pupils. They start at six years old (preparations for entry can begin as young as three) and are weeded out from then on by cut-throat examinations. The young women I talked to all agreed that it was virtually impossible to find a Chinese school where children felt relaxed and happy. Many of them knew of young families who had left the country altogether to settle abroad rather than put an only child through the rigours of their own system.

But it is obvious to even the most cursory observer that education drives China. The university boom started as a means of extricating the country from economic recession. Wherever I went I talked to students in packed classrooms holding 250 or more. The huge new campuses on the outskirts of big cities were powerhouses, put up initially with strictly limited staff and resources to produce the new educated generation that has mobilised change. In the prosperous east, 50% of the school-leavers are now university-educated, and it is more like 70% in a city such as Nanjing.

THIS IS A world without maps. There were no street plans or road maps under Chairman Mao, so even professionals don't know how to read them. When the car in front skids to a halt without warning, it is generally because the driver is ringing a friend to ask how to get somewhere. On my first visit to the little country town where Buck set "The Good Earth", still a backwater in the poorest part of Anhui, the massive mud ramparts, the mud houses and the muddy main street had all gone, leaving almost nothing she would have recognised except the street markets. When I spotted one of these down a side turning, the driver >

Tough and ferociously competitive Chinese children coping with the rigours of their school system. OPPOSITE Country life goes on

> slammed on his brakes in the middle of a newly built four-lane highway, and simply abandoned his car while we got out to investigate. The side-street was lined, as it had been in Buck's day, with stalls selling fruit, vegetables, mounds of different coloured grains, beans and pulses, caged and loose chickens, crates of white pigeons, great baskets of red and black crayfish, and live fish in plastic bowls of water: shrimp, crab, frogs, eels, lithe dark trout, silvery flatfish, white water-worms. Tailors and shoeshine boys worked from the gutter, and the air was filled with the smell of roast sesame seed from freshly baked buns, pancakes and waffles.

Places like this disappear too fast for maps. Any number of people told me about going back home after a few years away, only to find the streets where they grew up had vanished as completely as if they had never existed. In one of Buck's earliest stories a hot-water seller watches his home, his business and his entire community being bulldozed to make way for the first modern road that ripped through Nanjing's old city in 1927. This year Xinran arranged for me to meet a maker of paper lanterns who had the same thing happen to him during a more recent clearance round Nanjing's Confucius temple.

His family belonged to a fraternity of 200-300 lantern-makers, now forcibly dispersed. They sold their seasonal wares on stalls round the temple at New Year from the reign of the first Ming emperor in the 15th century until Chairman Mao very nearly stamped out the trade during the Cultural Revolution. Today, Mr Lu's cramped workshop in another part of town is still crammed with dragons, lions, unicorns, frogs, fish, lobsters, rabbits, exquisite pink silk lotus blossoms and tiny paper water-lilies, all cut, coloured and pasted by hand. His masterpiece last year was a traditional nine-dragon setpiece: a six-foot-long painted coffer designed to be carried shoulder-high with exuberant illuminated paper dragons prancing or coiled round the sides in red, green, blue, yellow and orange.

THE FAMILY BELONGED TO A FRATERNITY OF LANTERN-MAKERS... THEY SOLD THEIR WARES FROM THE REIGN OF THE FIRST MING EMPEROR TO CHAIRMAN MAO'S TIME

All of these are the product of hard labour in the sweltering heat of summer or in the freezing winter (in

PANOS AKG

March, people were still wearing their padded coats indoors and out, in shops, restaurants, classrooms, even in their own homes). An order in hand for nine large lotus lanterns – a speciality invented by Mr Lu himself after close study of the originals on Nanjing's Lotus Lake – could be met only by working late into the night for a week. The individual paper petals of the countless water-lilies designed to be floated every year on the lake had to be minutely and evenly scored, folded and crimped by hand, until two years ago when Mr Lu installed a simple, hand-operated drum-and-cable machine that can turn them out, two or three at a time, every four or five minutes. Even so each flower still needs to be individually assembled, tied and glued round a coloured nightlight.

Mr Lu, who is 70, has been practising and refining his skills since he was ten. "Nowadays the young people can't stick at it for even one day," he complains. He and his wife, also 70, face an uncertain future with dwindling custom, no one to take over from them and employees increasingly reluctant to work all day every day for less than the state retirement pension. Far worse, from their point of view, is the indifference or contempt of the young for a rich, complex, ancient art of colour and form that goes back 500 years and takes a lifetime to master.

Yet people like this are perhaps better off than the lost generation now in their 50s, men and women who grew up unskilled and uneducated when the schools were shut for ten years in the Cultural Revolution, forcing them to work as drivers, cleaners or manual labourers. The much younger women I met belong to what is generally agreed to be the luckiest of all the generations, born in the 1980s and 1990s to a time of prosperity and social mobility no longer so stringently constrained by political or practical exigencies of hunger and want. "They think differently," one of their elders said to me.

BUCK DESCRIBED A young Chinese university colleague with a postgraduate degree from America who flatly denied, during one of the many great famines, that such things could happen in China. She had seen desperation and misery at first hand in Chicago slums, but nothing Buck could say would persuade her to climb Nanjing city wall to see for herself refugees from the villages round about camping out without food or shelter.

I found similar indignation from polite but insistent students. Didn't I know how much China had changed, they asked. The modern world had made a clean break with the sad primitive outmoded countryside depicted in "The Good Earth". Didn't I realise how little that world had to do with them now? People everywhere wanted to know what I meant by the title of my biography, "Burying the Bones". I explained that it came from a passage in Buck's memoirs about how, as a small girl, she made secret grave mounds for tiny dismembered limbs or fragments of skull – the remains of newborn girls thrown out for the dogs to devour – that she found in the tall grass beyond her parents' back gate.

It seemed to me an image of amnesia, public and private. Heads always nodded in my audience when I said that all of us have bones to bury, things that are never talked about in families, things a whole nation might prefer to forget. People in China now dismiss their ugly memories just as people all over Europe dismissed the Holocaust for many years after the war. "Children can't bear to remember what happened to their parents," says Xinran, who recorded the life stories of men and women in their 70s and 80s in "China Witness" (2008), the only one of her books that remains banned today even in translation.

Buck insisted that our grandparents' world belongs also to us. The past made us what we are now, and we forget it at our peril. At the end of my last talk at Nanjing university, a student pointed out that burying the bones has a further meaning in China, where the dead are traditionally returned to the earth from which they came so that they may find peace. He might have added that it is only when the past has been acknowledged and accepted that it can finally be laid to rest. ■

The people's coastline

There's the beach, and then there's the English seaside. In our photo essay, **Sheila Rock** views it through American eyes, as "a forgotten England"

THE SEASIDE THE English do like to be beside looks different depending on who's doing the looking. "King Lear" conjures up the coast of Albion as a place of epic scale and dizzying perspectives. Vera Lynn made the white cliffs of Dover a wartime symbol of home. There's another coast that is altogether more domesticated and slipshod: bawdy in Donald McGill's postcards, seedy in Graham Greene's "Brighton Rock", gaudy in the Technicolor snaps of Martin Parr.

But these are all English views of England. The English coast comes with a fresh lick of paint in an affectionate new portfolio of photographs by Sheila Rock. An American who settled in Britain 40 years ago, Rock seems still to view her adoptive countrymen through anthropological eyes. And for her, the sea is a kind of magic carpet which transports them back to a magical monochrome yesteryear, a space where the English can get on with the business of being English without the trammelling distractions of digitised modernity. Here is innocence. Here is an absence of affectation and grandiloquence. Here above all is memory – of an era before bucket-shop package holidays, of Victorian leisure, in one striking instance of our early medieval visitors. Rock calls it "a forgotten England".

For her, the collection is a leap into the unknown, culturally but also creatively. She is known for her portraiture, once upon a time in the halcyon days of *The Face* magazine, most recently in her images of Tibetan monks. There are faces aplenty in her snaps of the seaside, mostly of young people discovering this old England for themselves. It's as if she has somehow sculpted them into the landscape, as if her unsmiling juvenile subjects are themselves organic outcrops of the native soil.

The project, before it had any such name or shape, began in East Anglia when she was staying with friends. "I just decided to photo the sea in a very abstract way." Then one >

"I was photographing something else", Sheila Rock says, "and I just chanced upon these children. I happened to be far enough away and on the right lens to get the right dynamic. They were like fairies on the beach." Rock shot only three frames

Sheila Rock found these twins in bright blue caps in a play pond on Canvey Island. "They were so extraordinary-looking. I actually tracked them like a hunter, I have to say. I didn't ask them to do anything or pull faces. The father was quite trendy, the hats are pulled on in an almost trendy way..."

> thing led to another. She kept getting jobs which took her to the coast – North Yorkshire, Cornwall – and started booking her assistant for an extra day or two. The beaches she was used to from childhood were in Hawaii, so she was not prepared for the faded Victorian splendours and the rainbow ranks of beach huts, for windswept pleasure zones offering crazy golf and donkey rides. "Everyone was very friendly and very fat," she recalls, "and they would sit as far away from the edge of the water as possible."

At first she concentrated on the south-eastern seaboard. Friends invited her to prettified Deal and Hastings, and she was lured by the whiff of chip fat and hardcore working-class-ness to Clacton-on-Sea and Canvey Island in Essex. Later she made special pilgrimages to Newquay, Blackpool and Weston-super-Mare, which gave baffling insights into the English relationship with the elements. "I could never understand why they are famous seaside places because they get the worst of the British weather from the Atlantic. I had this idea of photographing the English on the sea in great blistering hot weather in the middle of July and August, and it either poured with rain or was freezing cold."

On her trips Rock lugged three cameras: a lightweight Mamiya 7 for rapid reportage, a tripod-mounted Wista 45 wooden field camera for landscapes, and, less often, the more studio-friendly Hasselblad. But if a chance image presented itself she would use whichever camera was in her hand. Sometimes, particularly when the light was propitious in early morning, she would think only about landscape. The pursuit >

Filey, North Yorkshire, very early one [illegible] Rock's summer visits, the sky was putting [illegible] "It added to the bittersweet melancholic [illegible] meditative moment. One of the things that [illegible] is the tranquillity, and the quality of the light. Whatever sort of person you are, you stand in it and it captures you."

> of the unexpected became an obsession. "I may have walked a mile and a half to come to some place that someone had told me about, and it was so disappointing or the elements weren't right and I'd have to walk a mile and a half back and get nothing."

She would also have "days when I'd look for people". Permission was always sought from adults to photograph children, and if using the plate camera, she could proffer black-and-white Polaroids to barter for their time. Being petite and female helped too. What she discovered, above all in the magnificent image which opens this essay, is that people behave like the weather: they scurry across a photographer's sight lines like clouds scudding overhead, creating unpredictable shapes in relation to landscape and light, ever changing but also never changing, like the seaside itself. – JASPER REES

Sheila Rock came across this girl on a jetty north of Clacton-on-Sea, Essex. "What was odd was she was playing, but all kitted out as though she was going to go diving." The girl offered to remove the mask, but Rock asked her to keep it on. The camera was the cumbersome tripod-mounted Wista 45. "She was freezing cold"

Above Rockabilly teenagers in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset. "I just thought they needed to be photographed," Sheila Rock says. "They preened themselves before. I gave the girl a Polaroid – she didn't like it because she thought she was fat, but I think she was beautiful. The boy was trying to be mean and moody, but he was very sweet"

Right These bright beach huts run from Walton-on-the-Naze to Frinton-on-Sea in Essex, and from working-class to chi-chi. "This was done very early in the morning when the tide had gone out," Rock says, "which is why you have the remnants of the sea. I like that little bit of reflection"

Left Filey, in North Yorkshire, was Rock's favourite haunt of all. "I liked the strong light. I got into the graphic nature of the architecture along the coast." With this shot, she captures the contrast between the corrugated sand and the sharp angles of the steps. She likes to think of it as "a classic 1920s picture"

Above Weymouth, Dorset. "This girl stood there for ten minutes getting enough courage to go in further, but the water was so cold. The light on her was soft, but there was this impending storm coming so you had the darkness of the sky. I just thought that juxtaposition was beautiful. It was completely unstaged"

"Water brings people together," Kathryn Gustafson at City Hall in Seattle, where she is based. This 2004 design, including the fountains and the red wall, won an award.

THE SKY IS MINE

Around the world, from Seattle to Singapore, Kathryn Gustafson is feted as a leading landscape architect. But in Britain she is still the woman behind a much-derided memorial to Princess Diana. **Michael Watts** meets her

THE SUBJECT OF landscape teems with chroniclers of every kind. There are psycho-geographers, deep topographers, poets and explorers of urban edgelands like Paul Farley and Iain Sinclair, land artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, as well as the scholarly figures of Richard Mabey and Simon Schama. But the constant figure in the landscape is the landscape architect, entrusted with the design of our outdoor and public spaces, and in consequence an important civilising influence down the centuries, from André Le Nôtre and his gardens at Versailles in the 1660s to Frederick Law Olmsted and the Central Park he created in New York 200 years later.

To the layman, the job of a landscape architect may be just to fill in the green bits around a new building (television gardeners have much to answer for). But in the contemporary language of this discipline, the design and care of an environment is expected to manifest nothing less than a society's identity, culture and technology. To meet a practitioner as focused as Kathryn Gustafson is illuminating. It's not often that you encounter someone who proclaims, "the sky is mine," or who says, unblushingly, "it's almost like I pull out from the earth what is its essential thing."

American-born and just turned 60, Gustafson is the grande dame of modern landscape architecture. She intends that her remit as a landscape architect begins the moment >

PORTRAITS JULIE HARMSEN

> you leave your home or office; it's anything under the sun, urban or rural. Town planning, climate change, archaeology, civil engineering, geological history and local myths are all in the job description. Plants feel almost the least of it. Indeed, Gustafson's background is in fashion and sculptural art, not botany, and she began planting by herself only in later years.

At any one time, she has a dozen projects around the globe, run either by her firm of Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, covering America and Asia from Seattle, or by Gustafson Porter, her European practice, whose walls in Kentish Town, north London, are hung with plaster moulds of her original clay designs. She is a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, a medallist of the French Academy of Architecture, and a recipient, from the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, of the Sckell Ring of Honour, which sits on her small hand like a heavy gold knuckle-duster.

According to the critic and curator Aaron Betsky, Gustafson is now making "some of the grandest and most self-confident pieces of land sculpture our culture has seen". Her admirers include the British architect Norman (Lord) Foster, a frequent collaborator on projects across the world. "She has a personal way of going to the heart of the matter and identifying what is required," Foster says. "Then she devises landscape solutions that often seem intuitive but are, in fact, rooted in serious research."

"Urban plazas are often empty. Water makes people feel they are occupied"

This is an important part of Gustafson's method: she will investigate the history of any piece of land, back to before its first settlements. Her first questions on a new project are always: "Where's the water? Is there water? Who were the native peoples? And what are the myths?" She says this is "because myths don't go away – they become silent because nobody is listening. Each project is born of the land it's on, and of the people it's for."

Betsky reserves special praise for her Arthur Ross Terrace at New York's Rose Centre for Earth and Space, completed in 2000. And he's right: this is an experience. The terrace adjoins a planetarium, where a huge, floating sphere casts shadows, like a lunar body, across a plaza spiked with water jets; meanwhile the fountains' play of water on dark granite evokes something cinematic – the shiny streets of a film noir.

The device here of a shallow scrim of water is a typical Gustafson motif. It's in many of her constructions, like the Kreielsheimer Promenade for Seattle's opera house (2003), where opera-goers in their evening finery enjoy tiptoeing across thin sheets of water that shimmer with reflected colour. To pre-empt lawsuits from people slipping, she gets office workers in high heels to test the scrim – a prophetic decision, as we shall see.

"Water", Gustafson has said, "brings people together. And urban plazas are often empty. Water makes people feel they are occupied." Her Kogod Courtyard (2007), in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC, has a sheeny floor of water that vanishes to create a ballroom at night. Its undulating glass canopy was designed by Foster, as was the roof that encloses her garden of Mediterranean flora at the National Botanic Garden of Wales (1999). Striped with shad-

NIGEL YOUNG / FOSTER & PARTNERS

"A sheeny floor of water that vanishes to create a ballroom at night"
The Kogod Courtyard at the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC (2007), one of Gustafson's collaborations with Norman Foster

ows, and with plunging chasms and a waterfall, it has been described as "the Grand Canyon under a glass sky".

Gustafson has earned even more acclaim for the Lurie Garden in Millennium Park (2004), on a car-park roof in the heart of Chicago. Framed by a brawny Shoulder Hedge, its contrasting palette of light prairie grasses and dark ferns brilliantly encapsulates the history of a site that has progressed from "wild, marshy shoreline to railroad yard, to parking garage, to roof garden", in the words of Gustafson's American design partner, Shannon Nichol.

In person, Gustafson is an angular, vivid scrap of a woman, with long red hair, a warm, husky laugh, and rather cruel glasses that sharpen her pale features. She dresses invariably in black, which she insists is practical for travelling from project to project. At our second meeting in London, where she had arrived from her home in Paris, she wore black >

Personal growth Kathryn Gustafson at Seattle City Hall with a maple, chosen for its strong colour. The sight of a beautiful tree, she argues, can encourage civic responsibility

> culottes and a strange duck-billed cap made of black fur, which she joked must have come from a rat.

She is originally from Yakima, in the drought lands of Washington state, whose empty, tumbleweed landscapes clearly matter to her. On her computer, she shows pictures of the land around the family home, where a bare, rust-coloured mountain fills the screen. "Yes, I was raised in the desert, where the mountains are beautiful," she says, a touch wistfully. "I'm totally uninterested in anything jarring. There's so much in our lives already that is jarring. I want harmony and quiet."

She has a laconic, American way of speaking and, for all her moments of professional high-mindedness, can sound almost cussed. She has a reputation for being demanding but inspiring, with a forthrightness that compels affection. At one point in our conversation, she recalled a remark of her ex-husband (one of two), a fellow designer: "He said, 'We're not Beethovens. There's one Beethoven in millions.' I think he meant: don't worry whether you're talented or not – just do your work and don't be so self-preoccupied."

Asked about her own gifts, she shrugs and says: "Maybe it's just energy, persistence. I have lots and lots of energy. My mother and father had great energy. My mother now has Alzheimer's, and my father [a heart surgeon] is dead, but they had very full lives. I think energy and curiosity are very important."

"I'm totally uninterested in anything jarring. There's so much in our lives already that is jarring. I want harmony and quiet"

Nonetheless, she is fierce in defending her profession against criticisms of lesser status. "It's like cooking," she says sarcastically. "Everyone can do it, so there's no profession, right? The architects and the planners all know about it, but not the public, especially in Britain, where the thinking is, 'You've got beautiful gardens – why do you need anything else?'"

Gustafson calls herself "an architect of landscape" rather than a landscape architect, with its faint deprecating air of mowing lawns and planting borders; and she describes her collaborations with the likes of Foster, Renzo Piano and David Adjaye undeferentially. "They're sorta like a marriage – the ones you don't work well with, you don't work with 'em again."

Foster, though, she clearly reveres: she calls him "one of the smartest men I've ever met". Together, they have been developing six blocks of downtown Washington, DC, and reinstating and expanding the original 18th-century alleyways that ran between them. For four years, she has been going to Washington at least once a month. "Each project takes five years on average," she says. "You get to know a city very well." She is also working there with Adjaye, on an African-American museum, due to open as part of the Smithsonian in 2015; it will have a "rain garden" and a pool symbolising the ocean crossed by the slave ships.

THE CITY SHE loves best is Paris, where she has lived most of her life (currently, near the Bois de Vincennes), while keeping a home on Vashon Island, in Puget Sound, outside Seattle. It was in Paris and New York that she began her working life in the 1970s, designing prêt-à-porter and ski-wear. She did it for seven years, "not long enough to become successful", although critics maintain that the sensual draping of clothes, for instance, has strongly influenced her landscape work.

I asked Jane Amidon, head of landscape architecture at the Knowlton School of Architecture in Ohio and author of a book on Gustafson, what was her major achievement. "The re-introduction of the human body to site design," she replied. "The idea of how a body moves through the designed landscape – the relationship of posture and sight lines to topography and other site qualities."

Gustafson agrees: "For me, the form of the land and the form of the body come together somehow."

After a sort of environmental epiphany while living one winter by the coast near Seattle, Gustafson gave up fashion to study landscape architecture at the prestigious Ecole Nationale Supérieure du Paysage in Versailles, and then in 1980 opened her own office in Paris "because no one would ever hire me". Her first job was analysing the trace-lines for high-tension pylons, which led to designing corporate headquarters in and around Paris for Shell, Exxon and L'Oréal.

If it weren't for the frequent French strikes and long vacations, Paris would still be her office base, she says, because she has been slow to warm to London, a city that exasperates her. "Oh God," she groans, to the amusement of her London partner, Neil Porter, sitting beside her. "I'm claustrophobic, so I don't take subways here, and it's impossible to get anywhere in this city otherwise; everything is so spread out. Cabs are so expensive. I couldn't walk anywhere.

"Also, I think the single family house is the death of London. You see these houses with large gardens being built, and the space between them, it's not densified. So they take up more land, take up more sprawl, and people have to move farther out, and with them go the transportation, the services and infrastructure..." She sighs. "For a long time, I couldn't get a handle on this city at all. But I'm beginning to like it.

"One thing London has taught me is that there are all sorts of ways of finding little nooks and crannies where you can slice in vegetation and it doesn't feel suburban. I've never seen it in any other city. Because I trained in Versailles and live in Paris, I really thought green in a city was supposed to be only >

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> in designated areas, like squares. In Italian and French towns, you only get vegetation in the parks or squares. As soon as you put green outside on a street, then it starts to be suburban.

"But here it's fascinating how you turn a corner and somebody's put in a hedge, and there's a climbing yellow rose, and it becomes a moment in your day. It's changed the way I design in cities, how you create those little surprises. You're still in the city, but you have that softness. Whereas in the Latin world, it's all stone – stone and trees and water."

HER AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS London is not surprising. It is the site of her best-known work, one famous throughout the world, but also the cause of immense public controversy and personal dismay; it led to three years during which she received no new British commission, and she believes it denied her any chance of working on the 2012 Olympic Park. In many eyes, it is the single blot on her landscape – and it demonstrates the tricky politics of designing public works.

Landscape architecture was not a fruitful area for tabloid outrage until Gustafson created the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain in Hyde Park in 2004. Yet, even before its inauguration by the Queen, her design was condemned as an unfitting tribute: a "puddle" and a "paddling pool" were among the jibes. Prince Charles had had his monstrous carbuncle; now Diana was generating even greater architectural controversy from beyond the grave.

Gustafson and Porter envisaged a large, almost oval ring of stone. Cut from Bodmin Moor granite by high-tech drills in Northern Ireland, this stream-bed would flow in unpredictable directions. Their chief rival, the Anglo-Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor, proposed an equally beautiful, curved dome of water in the middle of the Serpentine; however, the fountain committee thought it was not sufficiently touchy-feely to commemorate "our Queen of Hearts", who in life had welcomed them all: the homeless and the elderly, the lepers, AIDS sufferers, drug addicts and victims of landmines. As national debate raged, Tessa Jowell, the Labour secretary for culture, media and sport, cast the deciding vote for Gustafson, who had already designed a Garden of Forgiveness memorial in Beirut and the Square of Human Rights in Evry, France.

Her Diana fountain was conceived as a place where people could dip a hand or foot but not wallow. Within days, however, crowds were, indeed, paddling. Soon, two adults and a child had slipped on the granite and gone to hospital. Then the surrounding grass was flooded in a storm when leaves blocked the drainage system. Reports began to appear of algae blooming in waters polluted by dogs and discarded nappies.

The fountain briefly closed, and when it reopened the following month it was surrounded by a fence preventing access. By December, special grass and new, gravel surfaces were being laid. But the press was now in full cry. One former trustee of the Diana Memorial Fund called it "a half-hearted, damp squib that is, quite frankly, dissing Diana even in death". The *Daily Mail* fulminated that "other countries do national memorials. Britain does national debacles." Clearly, even seven years after her fatal accident, Diana still obsessed the British.

The Diana fountain was conceived as a place where people could dip a hand or foot, but not wallow

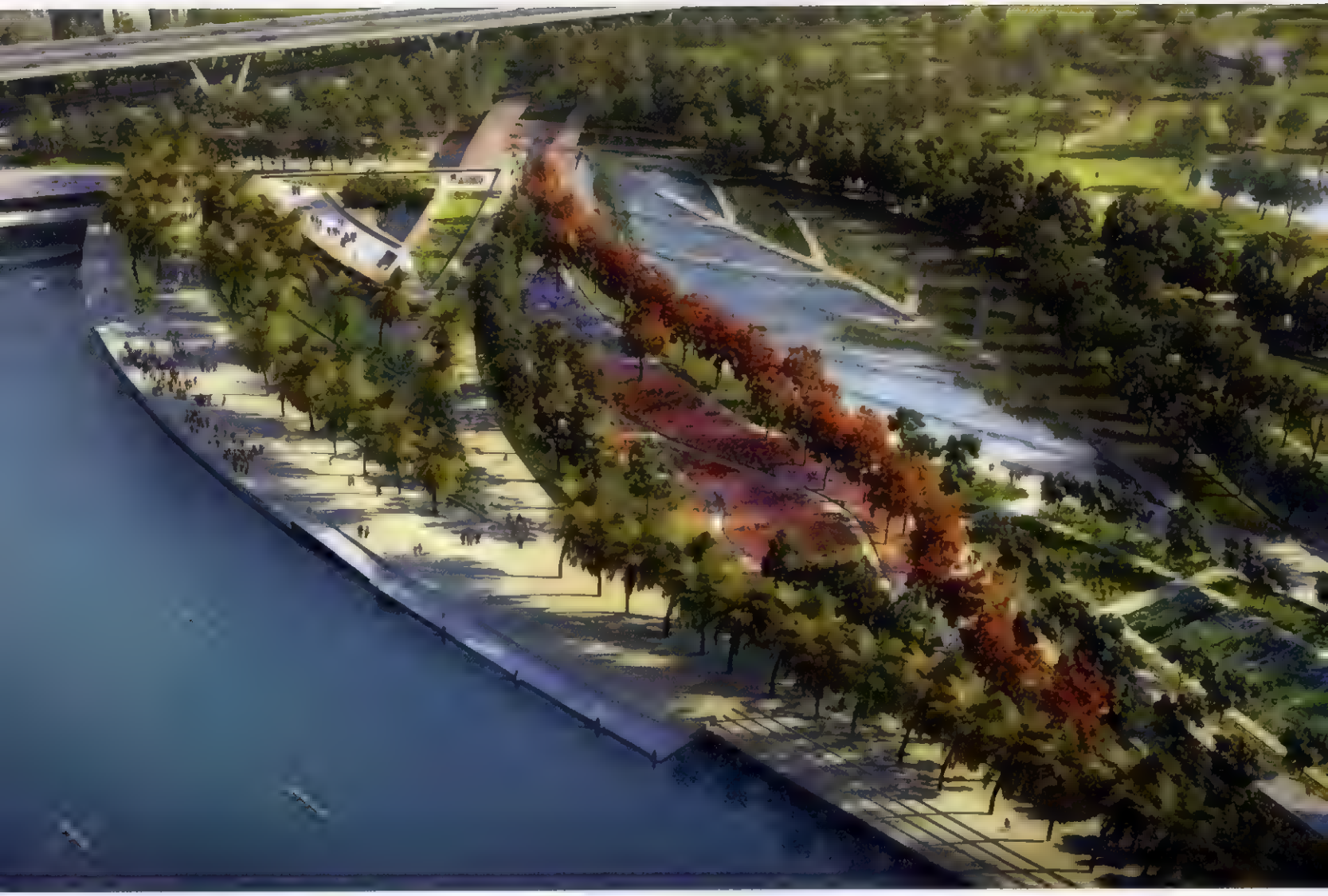
Today, Gustafson remains, or chooses to remain, bemused by the feelings she aroused. Growing up far away, she had believed only too readily in the stereotype of British reserve. "We expected them just to sit on the edge and touch the water," she says, sounding affronted. "I thought they would have some respect."

Nor had she fully appreciated Diana's significance to the public. "I knew who Princess Diana was, but I had never seen her famous TV interview, for example. I didn't know anything. I read some popular biographies to try and figure out: why was she loved? For me, as a French-American coming into it, it was a mystery. Why did they like this woman? The one thing that did impress me was that she really knew how to use her power, with all her charities."

Visitors, at least 800,000 a year, still flock to the monument (whose budget has risen over the years from £3m to £5.2m because of the problems). Gustafson doesn't repent the memorial itself, only its reception, but she does wish that

Stormy waters
The Diana Memorial Fountain in Hyde Park, London (2004)

HÉLÈNE BINET, GUSTAFSON PORTER



Preview of forthcoming attractions
Gustafson is working on three waterfront gardens in Singapore

she had never tendered. "I think we'd have been better off without it," she says, a little huffily. "I'll never forget: we put in for the [London] Olympics, and the next thing I know, I'm on the front page with Norman Foster and the word 'Diana' above me and a headline saying 'Do you want her to build your Olympic Park?' So we didn't get shortlisted. Nobody wanted to touch us with a ten-foot pole."

The reaction outside Britain was much kinder. "Any major designer faces cultural backlash on symbolic public works," Jane Amidon argues, "so it's likely the negative reception raised her profile." The big commissions continue to flow. On Gustafson's desk at the moment are a new waterfront in Singapore, an archaeological park in Abu Dhabi, and a 12-acre campus for the $500m Gates Foundation headquarters due to open in June in downtown Seattle. And she has just won a high-profile competition to design the €73m Parque Central in Valencia.

Of all countries, however, Gustafson would like to work next in Korea. "It still has the old houses", she enthuses, "and its traditional markets and crafts. But then it has this really hot, contemporary thing: good design. Really good designers, and clients who want to do new things. And the landscape! There are six mountains around Seoul, so wherever you are, you can always see natural landscape, outside of the city, because it's in this huge bowl of mountains with a river down the centre of it."

Can she sum up, in a word, why landscape architecture is important? "Civicness," she answers, promptly. She feels that if a person goes to their local park and connects with a beautiful tree, or even a bench, that encourages civic responsibility. She thinks for a moment, then relates something that happened recently in Paris. A car full of men stopped near her home and dropped litter in the gutter. "I picked it up, and knocked on the car door, and said, 'Not in my park!', and they drove off, looking sheepish. It was so instinctive for me. 'Hey, wait a minute! You're not gonna put your trash in my neighbourhood.'" I can see why they complied. ■

END

The writing on the hill

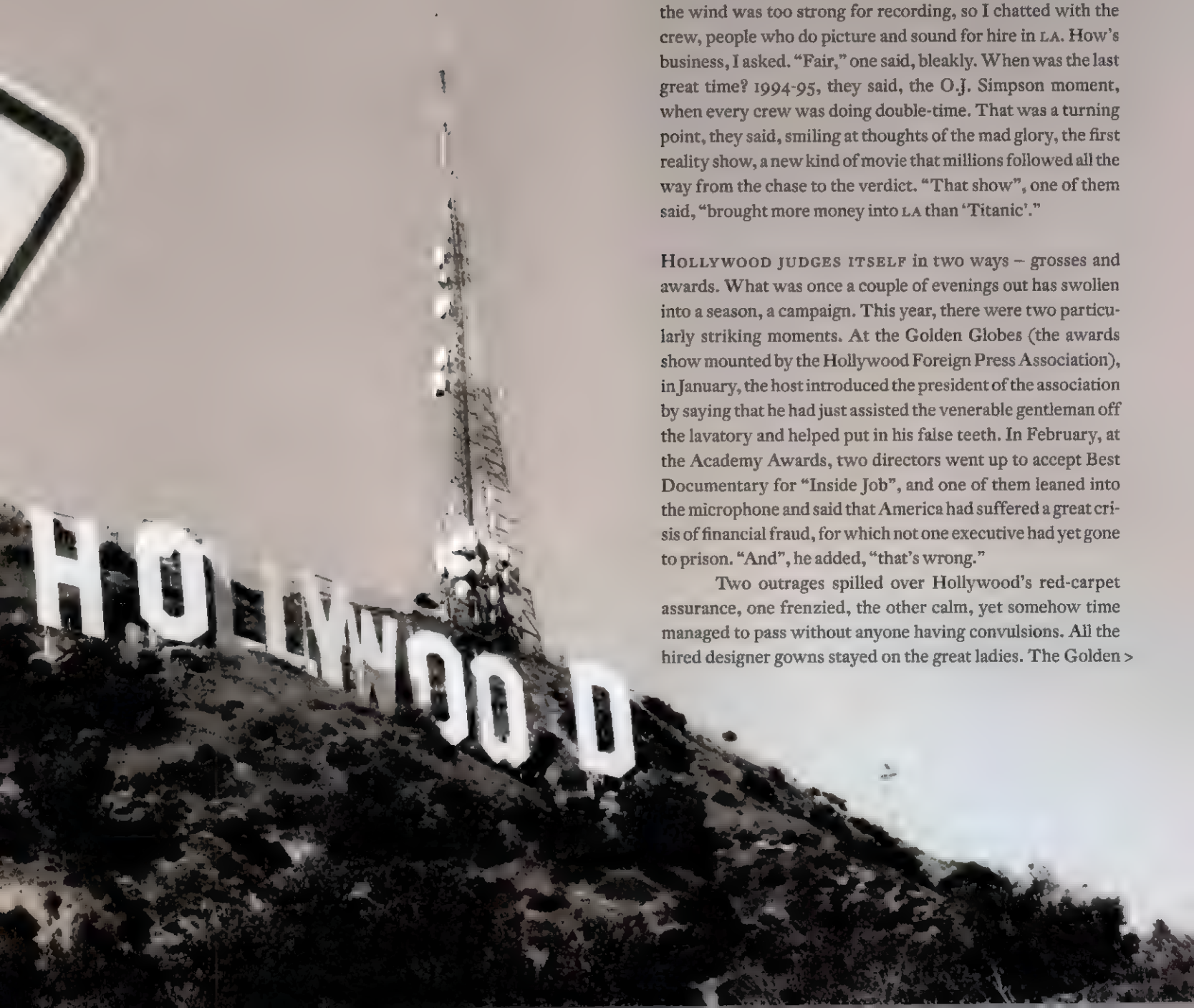
There's something rotten in the state of Hollywood, and it starts with the sign. An essay by **David Thomson,** author of "The Biographical Dictionary of Film"

A FEW YEARS ago I was up by the HOLLYWOOD sign, or as close as you can get. It is a wild place, a reminder that Los Angeles sits on the edge of desolate country with violent faults in the ground. The letters are enormous and sited in steep, unstable terrain, miles from any road. In 1932 an actress, Peg Entwistle, threw herself from the sign. The plunge made her name, and still no one can work out how she struggled up the rugged hillside, found a ladder, and reached the top of the H.

Never mind murder mysteries now. I was up there with a film crew. It was another programme on the history of Hollywood, and the director wanted me talking with the sign in the background, to lend "colour" and "authenticity". But the wind was too strong for recording, so I chatted with the crew, people who do picture and sound for hire in LA. How's business, I asked. "Fair," one said, bleakly. When was the last great time? 1994-95, they said, the O.J. Simpson moment, when every crew was doing double-time. That was a turning point, they said, smiling at thoughts of the mad glory, the first reality show, a new kind of movie that millions followed all the way from the chase to the verdict. "That show", one of them said, "brought more money into LA than 'Titanic'."

HOLLYWOOD JUDGES ITSELF in two ways – grosses and awards. What was once a couple of evenings out has swollen into a season, a campaign. This year, there were two particularly striking moments. At the Golden Globes (the awards show mounted by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association), in January, the host introduced the president of the association by saying that he had just assisted the venerable gentleman off the lavatory and helped put in his false teeth. In February, at the Academy Awards, two directors went up to accept Best Documentary for "Inside Job", and one of them leaned into the microphone and said that America had suffered a great crisis of financial fraud, for which not one executive had yet gone to prison. "And", he added, "that's wrong."

Two outrages spilled over Hollywood's red-carpet assurance, one frenzied, the other calm, yet somehow time managed to pass without anyone having convulsions. All the hired designer gowns stayed on the great ladies. The Golden >



> Globes host was the British comic Ricky Gervais, whom you may not see in that role again. The director of "Inside Job" was Charles Ferguson. Gervais's remark drew a gasp of wonderment and nervous laughter. Ferguson received a conscientious round of applause; you could sense a few executives in the room telling themselves, "He can't mean me! Can he?"

My impression was that he did mean them, and while he graciously urged the "show" to carry on, there is a feeling in America that our hallowed show business is now as hard to find, or hold, as the idea of Hollywood. The system doesn't bother to make enough Hollywood movies any more. It doesn't know how to, and the audience would hardly recognise them if it did.

Oh, I see, you may be saying, this is another of those pieces about the movies being dead? Well, yes and no. As a matter of fact, in 2010, there were two "mainstream" movies – by which I mean movies aimed at a lot of people – that knocked me out. "Toy Story 3" is an old Hollywood picture, about what time and memory do to us. It's from Pixar, in Emeryville, in the Bay Area – a family studio, a cosy workplace and a throwback to the past, yet hugely successful. It made people laugh and cry. Then there was "Inception". I know, some felt it was too confusing, too full of special effects. As one who had never much liked Christopher Nolan's films before, I thought this one was dazzling, light, unexpectedly funny, and filled with the wonder of what some effects can do in the service of a touching, humane story.

But the lesson of those two hits is not all we might like. The overwhelming drive in the mainstream film business now is to make blockbuster animated films, preferably ones that can be cloned – repeated, reheated and sold in packs of two or three or six, like fizzy drinks. Another is to base films so much on special effects that the audience is always seeing something it has never seen before – like the earthquake rippling along the runway in "2012", challenging John Cusack's plane to get off the ground in time. In short: make movies that have as little to do with the photography of life, faces, real places and ordinary action as you can manage. Meanwhile, a new video game, "Call of Duty: Black Ops", grossed $1 billion in six weeks. That is about 10% of what all theatrical movies together manage in America in a year. And it's not just America: my grandson, at school in London, says other kids won't talk to you if you're not into "Call of Duty" and its kill-counts.

When the American film business became international, it moved towards what it believed was material for the 18-24s with franchising prospects: violent, cruel, cool, self-interrupting. The executives listened to the marketeers, and the film-makers had to decide whether to go along with them. The alternative was to go independent, or try television. Both of which meant a drastic cut in income.

A generation of directors who thought they owned the business as kids in the 1970s had to decide whether to stay part of it or be artists. Steven Spielberg is the only one who may still be able to convince us he's both: we will see with "War Horse" and "The Adventures of Tintin". Francis Ford Coppola has gone back to being an artist, while moonlighting in wine and eco-villas. George Lucas exists in the gloom of his own big business. And Martin Scorsese is something of a wreck, trying to have it both ways, making music documentaries (George Harrison next) and television ("Boardwalk Empire"), and still directing movies without firing on so many cylinders ("Shutter Island"). Mostly born in the 1940s, they are of an age still to be our great directors, but they have yielded to a generation of new kids who do what the money demands. You see, we don't have great directors any more. The computer makes our movies. Its efficient anonymity is the new style: look at the anonymous figures and the metallic sheen of "Black Ops". That style, a kind of subtle fascism, haunts our films, from "Black Hawk Down" to "Battle: Los Angeles".

The picture business likes to tell us, and itself, that it is doing very well. In the first decade of this century, America's annual domestic box office pushed over $10 billion ($10.89 billion for 2010). But $10 billion, you realise now, is not so great. And in the small print you find that in 2010 1.37 billion tickets were sold, whereas in 2002 it was 1.58 billion – so in eight

Just salesmanship
The sign as it was when it first appeared – selling real estate

years, 13% of the audience has melted away. In the 1940s, as war ended and families were reunited in the dark, the figure was 4 billion tickets a year. And the population of America was half what it is now. That's what "mainstream" once meant.

In that light, our venerable Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, now in its 80s, looks a little shaky. It has two physical incarnations: the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre on Wilshire Boulevard for tributes and events, and an exceptional research library, named after Margaret Herrick, the first librarian at the Academy, and an invaluable source for film historians. There are wistful hopes for a proper movie museum – something LA has never had. Mainly, it puts on the big show, the Oscars telecast. The bulk of the Academy's revenue (about $70m a year) comes from that one show, and its audience has been wilting.

A smaller portion of the public is going to movie theatres, and Academy voters find it harder to believe in "mainstream" pictures. Think about this list: "The Bridge on the River Kwai", "Gigi", "Ben-Hur", "The Apartment", "West Side Story", "Lawrence of Arabia", "Tom Jones". Those are the Best Picture winners from 1957 to 1963. Never mind how good they were then or seem now, those films were all made in the confidence that every cinema-going adult might see them.

In the early 1990s, the pattern just held: "Dances with Wolves", "The Silence of the Lambs", "Unforgiven", "Schindler's List", "Forrest Gump", "Braveheart" (miss a year, 1996) and "Titanic". There is more violence in those films, more darkness, which made it harder for two or three generations to enjoy them as a family. "Schindler's List" was too distressing to be a family film, but it was a gesture from Spielberg (both Arthur and Merlin to the industry then) that said, This is Important and This is For You All – much as "The Best Years of Our Lives" (1946) turned on that word "our", and the feeling that a movie could embody a shared experience.

In the year I missed, 1996, Best Picture went to "The English Patient", a radical departure – a challenging novel (by Michael Ondaatje) ingeniously rendered by Anthony Minghella, but a picture that had no intention of saying, "This is for *everyone*". It had the inward complexity of an Antonioni film. As a movie that resembled a novel in its impact, yet still took the top Oscar (plus eight others), it proved a marker. Ever since, there have been only three plausible, mainstream Best Pictures – "Gladiator", "Chicago" and the third "Lord of the Rings" picture. The other winners have been edgier, more independent, less accessible: "Shakespeare in Love", "American Beauty", "A Beautiful Mind", "Crash", "Million Dollar Baby", "The Departed", "No Country for Old Men", "Slumdog Millionaire", "The Hurt Locker" and "The King's Speech".

In 2010, fearing audience slippage on a perilous scale, the Academy tried to broaden its appeal. It expanded the shortlist for Best Picture from five to ten nominees and spread the word to its 6,000 members that popularity might be a defence of the institution itself. It had high hopes because 2009 had produced "Avatar", which had raked in about $2.7 billion, far more than the previous biggest picture, "Titanic" ($1.8 billion).

The Academy responded by voting for "The Hurt Locker", a war movie seen by one American for every 50 who went to "Avatar". Who do you think we are, the voters seemed to be saying – mere movie fans?

This year, a fuss was made in advance about an Oscars show aimed at the young demographic that is deemed crucial to the business. The hosts, James Franco (aged 32) and Anne Hathaway (28), were supplied with self-referential jokes. "You're looking lovely," he told her, in time-honoured fashion. "And I have to say," she replied, "you're looking very tailored to a young demographic." The upshot was that the American TV audience fell again, from 41.7m to 37.6m, with a 12% slump in the 18-49 age bracket. In 1998, the year of "Titanic", it was 57m, so more than a third of the viewers have drifted away. At this rate, the Oscars show can't last.

Plenty of people prefer their movies on DVD now – though even those numbers are plunging, and as physical objects give way to downloading, the assumption has to be, as with CDs, that the number of takers will fall. Kids are watch- >

> ing movies in places many members of the Academy have barely heard of: on computers, on pads and pods and phones and pulses (have you got a pulse yet?). They're watching on screens they can hardly see. So they keep them on the way they keep the light on. They're not quite looking any more, and the consequence is that movie narrative is slipping away.

YET THAT HOLLYWOOD sign is still there, glaring out over the city like a grin, insisting that everything is swell. It becomes more surreal every year.

In its bones, Los Angeles recalls desert and silence. In the late 18th century, in the age of Spanish missions, its population was maybe 100. By 1880 it was 11,000. Today, the city has 4m people, but Greater Los Angeles has four or five times that – in 2006 it was 17m. So LA is vast, and it's still in the west, the world of droughts, fires, earthquakes and abrupt changes of mind. Until a few years ago, Las Vegas boasted about being the fastest-growing city in America. Now that's stopped. Unemployment has set in. There are thousands of empty houses. It only needs a couple of years of sun and wind and we're back to a ghost town in the raw Nevada desert. That couldn't happen to LA, could it? Well, not if you're sure the next big one is 1,000 years away. Did you see "2012"? You should – it was terrifying. We can end the world, don't worry about that, with CGI, or in any of the traditional ways.

LA is still busy with film-making. It is a servicing centre for movie production: it's where the financing, the contracts and the insurance are locked down; and it still employs at least 300,000 people, making, enabling and catering for television, DVDs, video games, pornography, ads, viral videos, projections, snippets, gimmicks, jokes and shockers, as well as theatrical movies. Some productions "run away", to cheaper locations (Canada, above all) or to rooms overseas where computers are endlessly pulsing. But the LA County Economic Development Corporation is happy to report 15% more shooting days in 2010 than in 2009, and it thinks 2011 will be better still. Of course, the rosier tomorrow is a Hollywood standby.

In the run-up to the 2011 Oscars, as it emerged that "The King's Speech", shrewdly judged but self-contained, was winning, some felt "Winter's Bone" was a greater achievement. It came from a far less calculated sensibility – shot in Branson, Missouri, by the independent director Debra Granik, with fresh names and faces and a Daniel Woodrell novel as its basis. It cost $2m, whereas "The King's Speech" cost $15m, not counting the Oscar campaign. I'm not decrying $15m – indeed I'd be happy to legislate it as an average cost for movies – but when the producers of "The King's Speech" told us, with Oscars in their hands, that their financing had been difficult, they might have talked to Granik. And we should all watch her portrait of how some Americans have to live.

Granik has a view of the world that understands that education and opportunity affect behaviour. The Ozark poverty she depicts cannot be separated from the unmitigated

greed in "Inside Job". Charles Ferguson's documentary should have been nominated for Best Picture, too, because it takes on the dominant American experience of the last few years. Is that why Hollywood prefers to change the subject now – to keep us preferring entertainment to the investigation of real dismay?

But that other place, America, makes strong films. From this century so far, consider these, all defying the prevailing climate for safe, diversionary rubbish that will sell anywhere: "Mystic River", "Birth", "A History of Violence", "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada", "No Country for Old Men", "Burn After Reading" (a dark but authentic comedy!), "A Serious Man, "There Will Be Blood", "Catch Me If You Can", "Starting Out in the Evening".

And American television, once justly derided, now rivals British TV's great days – "The Sopranos", "The Wire", "Treme", "Big Love", "Six Feet Under", "Boardwalk Empire", "Mad Men", "Rubicon", and the remake of "Mildred Pierce", with Kate Winslet as Joan Crawford. The list goes on, loaded with character, narrative, dialogue and humanity, the very elements that Hollywood has drained from the mainstream movie because it assumes we are too stupid or lazy to get them. Has it not noticed this ample evidence of a vigorous creative spirit in America, trying to tell (and hear) our stories?

This is where Hollywood and America need to confront each other. If Hollywood no longer functions as a positive cultural influence, why tolerate that daft sign, why not let Los Angeles be whatever it is (see Paul Thomas Anderson's "Magnolia", Robert Altman's "Short Cuts", David Lynch's "Mulholland Dr.", and Curtis Hanson's "L.A. Confidential"), and why not relieve America of the maddening burdens of "no

business like show business" and being "the greatest country on earth"? Do you see how those clichés resemble the label stuck up on the hillside, urging the city, its children and its huddled masses to settle for symbols and a shaky past?

The sign was originally HOLLYWOODLAND (in the 1920s), a blunt advertisement for a real-estate development in the land below the sign. It was business, not mythology. This is spelt out in Leo Braudy's fine new book, "The Hollywood Sign". No one ever seems to have complained enough about the affront to nature or the eyesore commercialism. But the development came and went. The sign crumbled. So in 1949, the city lopped off the "LAND". Then, as it declined further, some people determined that the sign was an emblem that had to be saved. This is not typical of LA where the habit is to treat buildings like sets and rip them down when you're bored with them. This is the culture that taught us to see decor as a changeable mechanism in life, just as it gave us "day-for-night", back projection and photo-shop.

In the late 1970s, a mixed bag of benefactors – including the "Playboy" tycoon Hugh Hefner, the singers Andy Williams and Alice Cooper, and Les Kelley, who owned a guide to used-car prices – gave money to have the sign restored. By then, the old studio system had been cast aside and fewer of its stars were active. A movement had begun to reappraise American films as independent works from non-wealthy but creative people – as opposed to the ongoing advertisement for unreality the factory system wanted us to buy.

But that marketing has lingered past its own shelf-life and the lost art of mainstream pictures. Hollywood thinking still wants us to trust that good-looking people are good; that you will fall in love and get a happy ending; that women are seen, while men watch; that desire and dreaming are necessary pursuits that take precedence over evidence and reasoning; that justice will be done, very likely with a gun; that stories are resolved and heroes are sound; that you can understand experience just by looking (so keep everything cinematic); that shopping can make you whole and clean (think of Julia Roberts in "Pretty Woman", one of Hollywood's fondest love-letters to itself); that, in the land of the free, celebrity is a hallowed state, instead of the madness waiting for a Charlie Sheen.

I know, that's a lot to take in, and your response may echo the movie executives in February when Charles Ferguson said, "And that's wrong" – "He can't mean me! Can he?"

But I do mean you, and me, and our prospects for intelligent life. I mean the realisation that "Hollywood" is deceased, and deranged – a dangerous ghost. I am thinking of its grim legacy of rousing catch-phrases in our public life: "mission accomplished", "no child left behind", "the show must go on", "a well regulated militia", "the remaking of New Orleans", and even "orderly change".

The mission was not accomplished; it never will be, because great areas of the world are beyond America's superficial understanding. Countless children are being left behind by government design; the educational system continues to fall behind its own best traditions. There are lots of "shows" that should not go on, and which will falter eventually: Guantánamo, Afghanistan, network television, movies in theatres. A well-regulated militia is an enigma to most Americans. New Orleans has not been remade. No one is even planning to do it.

Then there is "orderly change", that deeply American paradox. It was the strategy offered early in 2011 by President Obama, to recommend how Egypt should abandon old leaders and embrace "freedom" – but keep it orderly, please, because we dread disorder more than we hate tyranny. The only problem was that for several decades America had treated President Mubarak as an ally worthy of funding, arms and moral support and a blind eye turned to abuse of human rights and institutionalised poverty. That is the hypocrisy of "the greatest country on earth", a boast that offends all other nations and simply misreads the world. It's not a pyramid: it's a globe.

Now, wait a minute, you may be saying – isn't this a long way from Hollywood? But the state we are in – the slogan thinking, the cheap glorification of America, the stereotyping of other nations – is a culture that Hollywood laid down.

Hollywood thinking still wants us to trust that, in the land of the free, celebrity is a hallowed state

American leaders govern by television appearance, which gets its implicit claim on virtue, and many of its tricks, from movies. That's why it's so vital to recognise the difficult movies made in and for America, as opposed to the Hollywood product. The sad state of the official film business is a symptom of something bigger: the gridlock America has to face up to, if it is to reclaim the ideas and experiences on which it was founded.

So here is what I am proposing, modestly, in the Swiftian sense. Take down the HOLLYWOOD sign. Does that seem like desecration? Un-American? The sign now has a trust to protect it. Tourism expects it, they say. But tourism depends on our wish to see something new, something different, something real. We go to France not just to photograph the Eiffel Tower, but to discover French life. The Taj Mahal may be pretty, yet it has so little to do with living in India.

Still, I'm prepared to compromise to encourage a revived taste for reality in America. If tourists will become somnambulists without some signpost in the Santa Monica mountains, if a sign can be a beacon for aliens or lost aircraft, a comfort to the home-owners and homeless who live beneath it, then let's fold up HOLLYWOOD and replace it with something more elegant, more informative – and closer to a sentence. One of the depressing things about the present sign is its suggestion that the tribes living beneath it can't put words together. So how about: IS THIS WHERE THE LIES BEGAN? ■

CULTURE

Plaster class

Denmark's oldest museum is all about a single artist. **Alan Hollinghurst**, author of "The Line of Beauty", revisits a temple of idiosyncrasy

I'D HAD NO more than a quarter of an hour there, five years before, but it had left me with strong and peculiar memories. The works themselves, the hundreds of sculptures in plaster and marble, had been impressive, but the building that housed them was what stayed in my mind. I'd seen nothing else like it: a massive free-standing Egyptian temple, painted a bright ochre; figures moving in frescoed procession around its outer walls, cream and ochre and plum against black backgrounds; a glazed inner cloister, in which statuary gleamed or hid in stripes of sunlight and shadow; and running round it, red, green or purple rooms in enfilade, like cells or stalls, each holding a white marble hero or goddess. The inspired colour scheme of these rooms, faded and subtilised by time, was unusually striking. It continued in the long central courtyard, frescoed with soaring palm trees, where the great Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen himself was buried, as if in a northern dream of the south.

I'd been in Copenhagen for a book fair, and my Danish publisher, knowing I was interested in buildings, had urged me at least to have a glance at this "most singular" museum before catching my plane home. At the time I had barely heard of Thorvaldsen. The museum's collection was evidence of a major artistic figure, if not exactly of a major artistic personality. The neoclassical idiom of his work, with its idealising reliance on antiquity, lacked the kind of expressive individuality that I felt I most prized.

Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) was the son of a poor Icelandic woodcarver and a Danish mother. He was sent as a boy to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, where he won prizes at every stage, culminating in the Great Gold Medal, which came with a travelling scholarship. So in 1797 he went to Rome to learn carving in marble (not readily available in Denmark), rapidly developed a successful practice and ended up staying there for the next 40 years. I had seen him likened to Keats as a humble-born genius who had mastered the educated repertory of classical allusion, but I had seen nothing of the teeming individuality of Keats, the intimacy or originality. I wasn't sure I knew how to look at Thorvaldsen. Could I even tell him apart from Canova, the great contemporary whose death in 1822 left him the most celebrated and sought-after sculptor in Europe?

Neoclassical education
LEFT Hollinghurst inspects Bertel Thorvaldsen's giant figure of Elector Maximilian I and his horse
ABOVE "Ganymede with Jupiter's Eagle" – and ochre walls

I guessed that the essential thing, with work of such restraint, was to have plenty of time for it; and this spring I returned for a whole day, starting with a privileged hour before the public was admitted. I would be able to dwell on the sculptures, and return to them in changing aspects, as the shafts of sunlight steepened and slid across them. For nearly a century after its opening in 1848 the Thorvaldsens Museum was lit only by natural light; in the depths of the northern winter it must have been a most mysterious and sepulchral place, the works emerging from the shadows only for a few hours each day. On a dazzling March morning it promised to come to life.

The city itself, with its wonderful walkable network of old streets and squares and its many towers >

PHOTOGRAPHS MIKKEL OSTERGAARD

> outdoing each other in fantasy and strangeness, had been turned into a hell of hoardings, barriers, Portakabins, pile-driving and excavations. A new metro was being installed, traffic was diverted, and in the cold early morning the streets were possessed by thousands of cyclists, red-faced in the wind, yelping at any incautious pedestrian who strayed into their lanes. On my way to the museum I warmed up (not quite the right word) at Vor Frue, the cathedral of Copenhagen, designed by the severely neoclassical court architect C.F. Hansen and completed in 1829. The great bare barrel-vaulted nave is lined with Thorvaldsen's monumental figures of the Apostles, but the eye goes at once to the high altar, dominated by his immense bearded Christ, standing with hands stretched out and down to show the stigmata. It still leaves me cold, but I see that the trick of it is to draw the viewer forwards, so as to meet Christ's downcast gaze. Noble and impersonal, it has lent itself to endless reproduction: copies of it adorn Temple Square in Salt Lake City and other Mormon churches across America.

Seen after Hansen's fine but chilly work, the architecture of the Thorvaldsens Museum seems all the more exhilarating. The building trumpets its own idiosyncrasy. Its 39-year-old architect, M.G. Bindesbøll, had only one previous work to his name, a grain drier in Norway. Somehow, in competition with far more established figures, for what was to be the first museum in Denmark and a celebration of a national hero, his vibrant novelty won out. The times were changing, and Bindesbøll seems to have been ahead of them. Absolute monarchy in Denmark was to end in 1848, the year the museum opened, and the academic classicism associated with the old order was subverted and reinterpreted in a colourful, eclectic and newly democratic light. Bindesbøll had travelled widely in Greece and Turkey, and his liberated delight in coloured decoration is shown in the drawings he made there, which fed into the vivid decor of the museum.

The times they were a-changing
ABOVE The front of the museum, with its bright paint and splayed doorways, reflected the mood of 1848
BELOW Frescoes by Jørgen Sonne tell the story of the museum's creation
RIGHT Rooms in enfilade run round the glazed inner cloister

The temple-like front is as powerful as I remembered, with five huge splayed doorways, outlined in white against ochre, and tall, pleasingly trapezium-shaped brown doors – a shape repeated in the articulation of all four façades. It is what gives the exterior of this Greco-Roman building its Egyptian look. The magical feature, though, is the two sequences of frescoes by the artist Jørgen Sonne, which run round three sides of the building. They tell the story of the museum itself. In the first strand we see Thorvaldsen's return to Denmark in 1838. Excited crowds gather and wave; in one panel a woman has fallen into the water and is helped back into a boat. Thorvaldsen himself steps ashore in the final panel, to be greeted by various dignitaries and friends, while behind him the mauve-shirted, white-hatted rowers raise their slanting yellow oars in the air. The drawing is lively and clear, and the faces of the unnamed figures typically more strong than handsome, but this side of caricature. The action, all round, unfolds against a black sky, and the boldness of the colour scheme is, oddly, both powerful and charming.

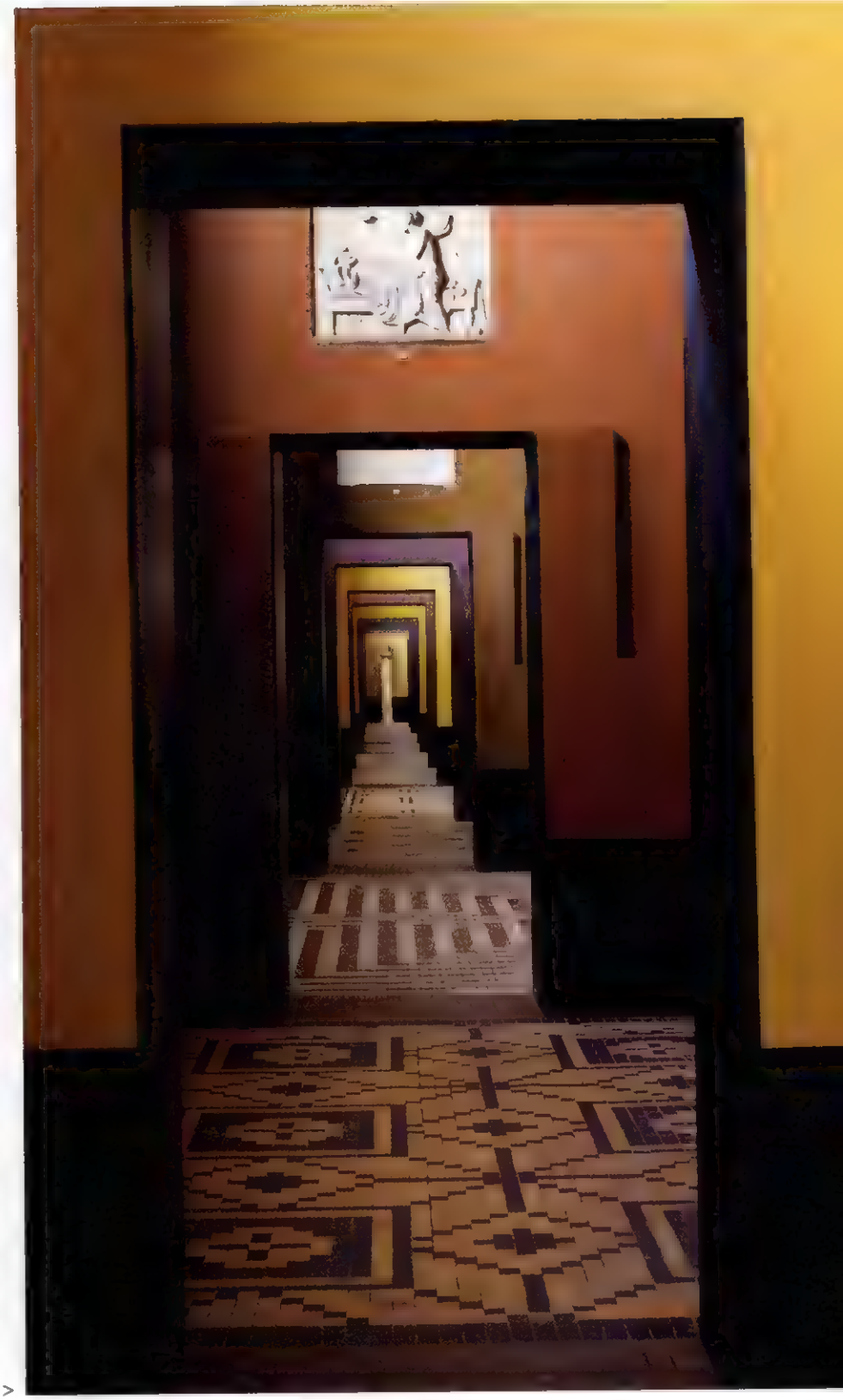
On his return to Copenhagen, the elderly Thorvaldsen announced that he would leave the contents of his Roman studio as well as his own large collections of antiquities and paintings to the nation if a museum were specially built to house them. Around the other two sides we see the arrival of these numerous objects, with the frigate that brought them, anchored along one corner of the building. From it emerge, first of all on rowing boats, and then on primitive wagons and litters, the accumulated spoils of Thorvaldsen's immensely productive career. There are echoes of a Roman triumph, but here the labouring townspeople who are pushing and heaving the trophies are themselves the victors, or at least the beneficiaries, barefoot in accordance with classical precedent, but otherwise in modern breeches, waistcoats and rolled-up sleeves. The Phrygian cap of the kneeling marble Ganymede bobs along beside the red peaked cap of the foreman supervising his transport. The pensively inspired Lord Byron, perched on a broken Grecian column, pen raised to chin, is tended by five men earnestly involved in their own practical task (a sheet caught in a wheel of the truck threatens to be a problem). Noble artworks are shown in the care of

the common man. His appreciation of them remains a matter of conjecture: an element of latent comedy coexists with the expression of a tribute. One group of men rest and mop their brows from the effort of pushing Copernicus. Another man with a bust under each arm has a profile to rival either of them. It is hard to convey the simultaneously workaday but momentous, festive but solemn nature of this frieze, which also forms an unusual advertisement for the contents of the museum, "like a sign for a menagerie", as Bindesbøll said, depicting highlights of the show inside.

In the upstairs picture galleries there's a painting by Friedrich Nerly that shows the transportation involved at an earlier stage of the artistic process. A gigantic block of marble, with "Thorvaldsen Roma" marked on it, is dragged along a road from the quarry by a team of six exhausted and collapsing buffaloes. We sense that something superhuman will in due course take place. In another painting we see Pope Leo XII visiting Thorvaldsen's studio, a tiny figure in pink dwarfed by the congregation of immense white sculptures. (The artist appears to be introducing the pope to Jesus Christ.) Thorvaldsen and his team of assistants worked often on a colossal scale. Yet all the largest works in the museum are plaster – usually the original plasters that served as models for the marble, or occasionally bronze, final works, and so fresher and closer to the artist's original vision for all their ambiguous air of being merely copies, or plaster casts. But, being plaster, they have discoloured over their nearly two centuries of existence, from the stove and candle smoke of their days in the Roman studio and from the different pollutants of modern life; they show varying degrees of grubbiness, and many of the smaller busts look as if blackened by incessant handling, though really it seems only by the air. It takes a bit of getting used to, and is shown up all the more by juxtaposition with the sculptures in flawless white marble.

Those giant works call for giant rooms, of which there are two, one of them a church-like space containing the original plasters of "Christ and the Twelve Apostles" where groups of young schoolchildren tend to gather. The other, larger hall was originally the entrance, running the width of the building behind the five great doors, and with its high barrel vault and attic windows it reminds me just a little of the concourse of some very grand neoclassical railway station.

It is dominated at either end by two equestrian figures that seem all the more stunning for their size, each over 15 feet high, and further raised on substantial plinths. On the left Prince Josef Poniatowski rides forward in classical dress, like a supersized Marcus Aurelius, but flourishing a sword rather than the open >



Sculpture shock
The superb "Jason with the Golden Fleece". The nudity meant that when the museum opened in 1848, children were chaperoned

> hand of command. Facing him, Maximilian I, elector of Bavaria, sword sheathed but right hand pointing forward and up, bears down on us magnificently. Poniatowski was designed for Warsaw, Maximilian for Munich. Between them, along the walls, are the seated Copernicus, for Warsaw, and Pope Pius VII, for his tomb monument in St Peter's. It is like some ad hoc Pantheon. Thorvaldsen seems to have been unconcerned by the ideology of his subjects or patrons, though the commissioning of a Danish Protestant to do a papal tomb was evidently controversial. The Poniatowski monument suffered repeated vicissitudes, at the hands of Tsar Nicholas I, who wanted it destroyed, and of the Nazis, who blew it to bits when they evacuated Warsaw in 1944. It seems to me both powerful and elusive, because of Thorvaldsen's characteristic way of sublimating the thrilling drama of his subject's end (riding his horse into the River Elster to avoid capture during the Napoleonic retreat) to some more timeless and impersonal image of noble leadership. The original commission had been for Poniatowski to appear in Polish cavalry uniform, the horse rearing before its final jump. Thorvaldsen's quite different conception is impressive and even inspiring, but not a bit dramatic.

It helps to know the stories behind the works, and part of their remoteness to me is due to a patchy classical education. In the long sequences of smaller rooms I am more struck by this distance, and by the rewards of overcoming it. There is a famous "Mercury", perched on a tree-stump: a fine youthful figure with the perfection of feature and worryingly tiny

penis one expects from a neoclassical artist. He has been playing panpipes, now held away from his lips, while his other hand, behind him, has begun to pull his sword from its sheath. I need to be told that he has just charmed Argus to sleep, and is about to kill him. Then the graceful young man in his winged helmet becomes more than picturesque, and I see that Thorvaldsen has chosen a moment, not of drama, but of tense equipoise between two actions. I need, too, to come close and, as with the heroic Christ, meet the downward gaze of the now rather terrifying blank eyes.

The question of how these works were viewed when they were most prized is an interesting one. When the museum first opened, children under confirmation age were not admitted alone for fear of the nudity. In a nearby room there is the superb "Jason with the Golden Fleece", naked but for sandals and helmet. Eyeing it from across the room is the bust of the wealthy Anglo-Dutch art collector Thomas Hope, who commissioned it, and thus enabled the young Thorvaldsen to stay on in Rome. Thorvaldsen took 25 years to produce the marble figure, which is both a spectacular showpiece and a kind of emblem of his Roman career. Nearby are Hope's wife and his two sons. Like many other subjects of busts, Hope tests Thorvaldsen's neoclassical code; what we see of him is conventionally naked (great men, like Byron and Frederick VI, may have togas or sword belts across bare chests) but portraiture still requires a likeness, in this case involving exuberant Regency sideburns. The relationship between Jason and his owner, and his owner's wife and children, has an historical piquancy and even a faint comedy of a kind Thorvaldsen generally prefers us not to see.

Upstairs there are half a dozen portraits of Thorvaldsen himself, which cumulatively show what a lion he was, and prove, rather as pictures of Liszt do, that here was an irresistible subject. He had (the one thing his own sculpted self-portrait cannot convey) the most mesmerising grey eyes, so persistent in portraits from youth to old age that the emphasis on them cannot be mere romantic exaggeration. Indeed, they tend to be rendered with a virtuosic lifelikeness that seems conscious of the distinct responsibilities of paint as opposed to marble. They are the eyes, one realises, as one wanders on from room to room among the things he made and the things he collected, that are the occasion and sine qua non of this whole extraordinary place. ■

Thorvaldsens Museum *Bertel Thorvaldsens Plads, DK-1213 Copenhagen K, Denmark, +45 33 32 15 32, www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk. Open Tuesday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm; closed Mondays, on 1 December, 24th–25th, 31st and January 1st. Admission DKr40, approx €5.40/$4.70; under 18s and art history students free, everyone free on Wednesdays.*

This year's belters

Which songs will ring out most memorably at this summer's festivals? Hazel Sheffield marks your card

You could argue that festival season started early in 2011. Street parties bathed in spring sunshine popped up to celebrate another British institution, the royal family. Royalty of a different kind hits the festivals when U2 finally headline the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury, and Pulp make their comeback. On the smaller stages, there is enough new talent bubbling up from the grassroots to keep you dancing until autumn – if you know where to look. *All songs at iTunes unless otherwise stated*

BEYONCE Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)
Inspired by her secret wedding in 2008, the year her man, Jay-Z, brought hip-hop to Glastonbury to stunning effect, "Single Ladies" is a single to wow the welly-wearers.

PULP Do You Remember the First Time?
Perhaps inspired by Blur's triumphant reunion in 2009, Jarvis Cocker reassembles the band for several festivals beginning with Primavera, in Barcelona, on May 27th. Another chance to celebrate Britpop, which was short-lived (c.1994-96) but long remembered.

U2 Pride (In the Name of Love)
They've promised a big-budget performance – "Glastonbury on steroids" – to make up for missing their Pyramid Stage slot last year. Production aside, the spiritual fervour of songs like "Pride" is made for those Glastonbury moments of near-mystical significance.

KATY B Katy on a Mission
The new queen of British clubland is taking the genre now known as UK funky to Glastonbury, Mallorca and Ibiza. One of the few contemporary pop talents to update the canon, Katy B mixes understated style with upbeat tunes that will turn fields into dancefloors. The perfect antidote to the indie bands that are still ubiquitous at festivals.

MAGNETIC MAN I Need Air (feat. Angela Hunte)
The dubstep DJs Skream and Benga have been stretching out the midnight hours at festivals for years. When they combine as Magnetic Man, their powers are doubled. This jittery club hit evokes the euphoria waiting to reward those who can go the distance.

METRONOMY Love Underlined
With their new album "The English Riviera" a shoo-in for the best-of-the-year lists, Metronomy's energetic live show is not to be missed if you're at the Melt! festival in Germany. The dark, pulsating "Love Underlined" will come into its own among the towering industrial cranes of the old strip-mining site at Gräfenhainichen, near Leipzig.

ODD FUTURE Sandwitches www.thefader.com
This LA hip-hop collective take some stomaching, but they were the toast of the tastemakers at this year's SXSW. While their records mix urban horror with heavy bass to powerful effect, their live shows are known for ending in complete anarchy. A must.

BENJAMIN FRANCIS LEFTWICH Atlas Hands
See this young singer-songwriter at a smaller festival – Green Man, Secret Garden Party or Beacons – to appreciate the elegant poetry of his acoustic songs. "Atlas Hands" is the stuff of those quiet, illuminating moments that happen away from the main stage.

ARCADE FIRE Ready to Start
Even early on, these Canadians were able to capture the precise moment at which the energy of a crowd turns into more than the sum of its parts. Now they play festivals from Tennessee to Montreux as headliners, armed with three albums of transformative pop.

NOTES ON A VOICE

No 6 Joan Didion

She has written five novels, numerous movie scripts, and one play, but Joan Didion's pre-eminence rests on the eight books of non-fiction – essays, memoirs and reportage – in which her cool, incisive, first-person voice is most evident.

She was born in Sacramento in 1934, when California's population stood at 6m (it's now 35m). In "Where I Was From" Didion traces her family to 1776, when her five-greats grandmother, "aged 16, married an 18-year-old veteran of the Revolution". That sense of a hardier world, and other values, remains. If Didion's grandfather saw a rattlesnake, he'd stop the car and go into the brush to find it, saying it was "the code of the West". Her father served in the war, sold insurance "when no one was buying" and played poker to support his family. Her California was never Ronald Reagan's.

Didion won a *Vogue* essay contest in 1956, but it wasn't until 1968 that her first book of essays, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem", announced her anxious meticulousness. Her essay on a murder in San Bernardino ("This is a story of love and death in the golden land...") so impressed Tom Wolfe that he put it in "The New Journalism". Didion published more collections, including "The White Album" and "Sentimental Journeys", and several novels, which took her tight elliptical studies of social fracture and bad nerves even further than the journalism.

Throughout a 40-year marriage, Didion also wrote screenplays with her husband, writer John Gregory Dunne, including "The Panic in Needle Park" (a break-out role for Al Pacino), "A Star Is Born" (Barbra Streisand) and "Up Close and Personal" (Robert Redford, Michelle Pfeiffer). After her husband died in 2003, Didion wrote "The Year of Magical Thinking", tracking the tides of grief and her own capacity for self-delusion. The book became a play, adapted by Didion and starring Vanessa Redgrave, which was staged in London and on Broadway. In 2005, her daughter Quintana died too – the subject of Didion's next book, "Blue Nights".

Key decision Saying "yes" to Robert Silvers, editor of the *New York Review of Books*, when he asked her to attend her first political convention in 1988. This move from stories only she might be covering to stories the media were all over compelled her to face the "insistent sentimentalisation" of American life. Her loyalty to what's in front of her own eyes ("my mind veers inflexibly toward the particular," she wrote in 1968) shows up the "dissonance" and "contradictions" in many of the "fables" that dominate the news. An outsider, Didion is scornful of mainstream journalism's "tacit agreements, small and large, to overlook the observable in the interests of obtaining a dramatic story line" ("Political Fictions"). Her subject becomes the way America deludes itself, or magical thinking.

ILLUSTRATION KATHRYN RATHKE

Strong points Her rootedness: the woman who sets the table and changes the sheets is the same one who notices the self-serving abstractions of 1960s hippies or 1990s neocons. Her relaxed use of direct address ("I recall...", "I am talking about..."). Her lawyerly way of building a case, without announcing it, through the hawk-like use of one-, two- or three-word quotes. Her precision with names, job titles, times, dates and places, which serves to pin down the "disconnects", "blurs", "codes" and "lacunae" of the story. Above all, the pitch-perfect cadences of her elaborate 200-word sentences.

Golden rule No formal interviews. A default position as much as a rule, it highlights Didion's apartness as a reporter: "I like to sit around and watch people do what they do." If this was born of shyness, it has become a strength. It forces her to be indirect and unannounced; she hangs around, listens hard, pores over clippings and reads more second-rate political autobiographies than is good for anyone. "Photographers she has worked with", wrote Tom Wolfe, "say her shyness sometimes makes her subjects so nervous they blurt out extraordinary things...to fill the...vacuum."

Favourite trick Moving between anchoring details and big emotional moments: "According to my kitchen notebook we ate linguine Bolognese and a salad and cheese and a baguette. At that point he would have had 48 hours left to live." ("The Year of Magical Thinking", 2006.)

Role models Hemingway for his "deceptively simple" style; Henry James for his "indirectness" and V.S. Naipaul for his use of "seemingly insignificant details". Her favourite novel is Conrad's "Victory": "the story is told third-hand".

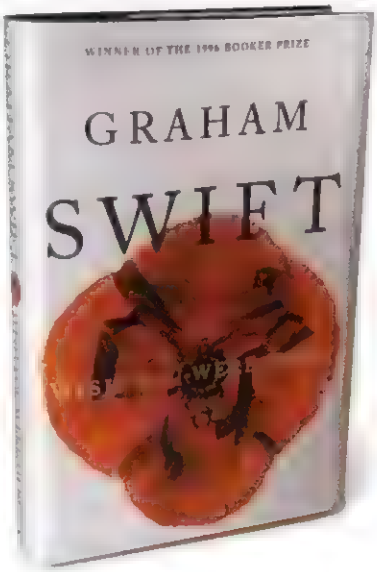
Typical sentence "On the August night in 1933 when General Gerardo Machado, then president of Cuba, flew out of Havana into exile, he took with him five revolvers, seven bags of gold, and five friends, still in their pajamas." ("Miami", 1987.) – ROBERT BUTLER

Maggie Fergusson *Eight Good Books*

A feast of summer fiction, from Graham Swift to Ali Smith, from St Kilda to Lesotho

Wish You Were Here by Graham Swift *(Picador, hardback, June 3rd)*. Born to a family of Devon farmers, now proprietor of a "herd of caravans" on the Isle of Wight, Jack Luxton sits at a rain-spattered window contemplating suicide. His to-be-or-not-to-be reflections form the still centre from which this novel ripples out to encompass the deaths of Jack's father and brother, the war in Iraq, and a lament for rural England. Graham Swift weaves the strands together like a master basket-maker; but, as Jack nears a decision, he loosens his grip, sending the reader hurtling through the final chapter on a rollercoaster of dread and joy.

Pigeon English by Stephen Kelman *(Bloomsbury, paperback, out now)*. In this modern-day "Lord of the Flies", inspired by the murder of Damilola Taylor in south London in 2000, children are stranded not on a desert island but on an inner-city sink estate. The story unfolds through the wide eyes of 11-year-old Harrison Opoku, newly arrived from Ghana, and he quickly becomes both convincing and lovable: an exuberant, intelligent Haribo aficionado, and the fastest runner in Year 7. Despite his dismal surroundings, Harrison radiates humour and hope. So when he turns amateur detective and falls foul of the notorious Dell Farm Crew, the sense of loss is shocking.



There but for the by Ali Smith *(Hamish Hamilton, hardback, June 2nd)*. At a dinner party in Greenwich a guest locks himself into his hostess's spare bedroom and won't budge – for weeks. Friends from his past remonstrate. Crowds and the celebrity press gather. A nine-year-old girl passes notes under his door, luring him back into the world with steady kindness. If you favour tidy plots and neat conclusions, this may not be for you. But if you are drawn to a writer who understands misery without being seduced by it, sees grace at work in ordinary lives, and conjures with words like a 21st-century Lewis Carroll, don't miss it.

Island of Wings by Karin Altenberg *(Quercus, hardback, out now)*. Until their evacuation in 1930, the inhabitants of St Kilda, west of the Hebrides, formed the strangest community in Britain, living in squalor and losing most of their babies to the mysterious disease known as eight-day sickness. This is the first full novel set in the islands. Karin Altenberg, a Swede writing in English, combines scrupulous research with psychological acuity in exploring the marital and pastoral struggles of Reverend Neil Mackenzie, minister of St Kilda from 1829 to 1844. His flock is essentially pagan: they worship their ancestors, not Christ. Yet they accept their sufferings with an implacable serenity that highlights Mackenzie's demons and doubts, driving him to the brink of madness.

Waterline by Ross Raisin *(Viking, paperback, July 7th)*. "Once a shipbuilder, always a shipbuilder," insists Mick Little after spending most of a lifetime in the Glasgow docks. But with the shipyards closed, and his adored wife dead, he heads down to London in search of a new way to be "normal". Living in B&Bs and swinging between inertia and panic, Little descends into alcoholism, then homelessness. As in his prize-winning debut, "God's Own Country", Ross Raisin has got right inside the mind of a man on the fringes of society. Mick Little becomes a figure not just of pity but of unsettling familiarity.

King of the Badgers by Philip Hensher *(Fourth Estate, hardback, out now)*. The estuary town of Hanmouth in Devon has all the hallmarks of middle-class respectability: a cheese shop, a book group, an energetic Neighbourhood Watch. By zooming in where CCTV can't reach, and plaiting many stories into one, Philip Hensher shows us Hanmouth's other side: gay orgies of eye-popping incontinence, a troubled teenager who ritually stabs her dolls with a hat-pin, and the cellar where 12-year-old China, who disappears from a housing estate at the start of the novel, is held captive and abused. Hensher's sensitivity to human weakness, and his ear for dialogue, make for a very black comedy.

In a Strange Room by Damon Galgut *(Atlantic, paperback, out now)*. A slim novel, spliced with memoir, divided into three parts. In each, the South African narrator, Damon, makes a journey inspired less by wanderlust than by "the bored anguish of staying still". Moving through Lesotho, Tanzania, and finally Goa, he forms intense relationships with fellow travellers, all of which seem full of promise, all of which go horribly wrong. Galgut's prose is spare, mesmeric, heavy with sadness and unfulfilled longing. Last year, this was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize. Clear an evening to read it before this year's shortlist comes along in September.

The Stranger's Child by Alan Hollinghurst *(Picador, hardback, July 1st)*. Seven years after winning the Booker with "The Line of Beauty", Hollinghurst returns with another big novel. In the summer of 1913, the poet Cecil Valance (think Rupert Brooke: handsome, bisexual, soon to die for his country) writes "Two Acres" and encapsulates an England about to be lost for ever. His brief life spawns biographies – first, a circumspect memoir by a politician, once his lover, then, following the Michael Holroyd revolution, a work of merciless candour by an ambitious former bank clerk. Hollinghurst shows an insider's knowledge of literary and academic life, clocking changes in social and sexual behaviour with elegant irreverence. The 564 pages flew by.

THE VISUAL CV

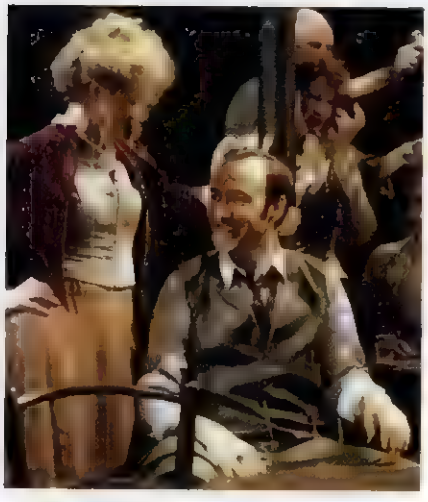
Kevin Spacey

Superb on screen in the 1990s, mainly an actor-manager since, Kevin Spacey now tackles one of the great roles: Richard III. **Jasper Rees** picks his best work

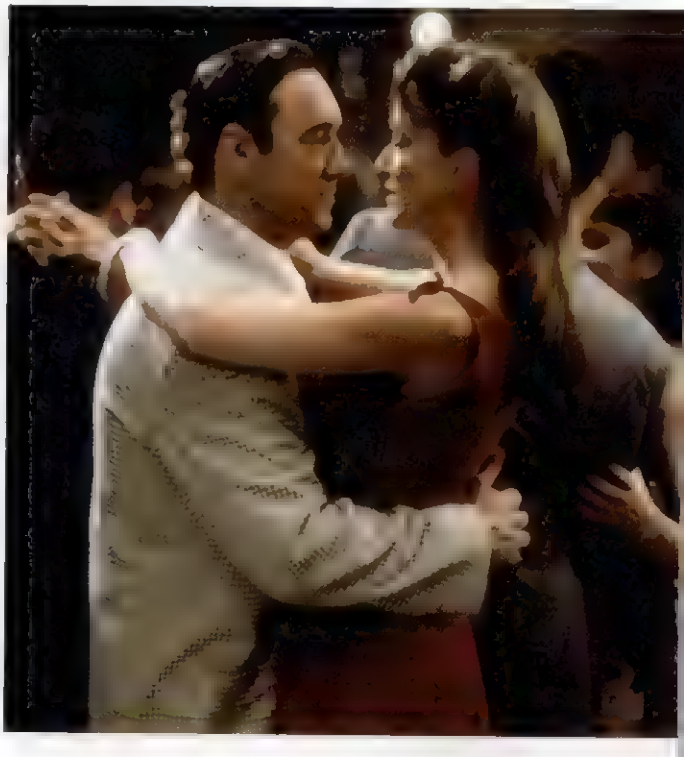
1995 The Usual Suspects Bryan Singer's densely plotted film noir, hingeing on the identity of the criminal mastermind Keyser Söze, was the first time many people had seen Spacey, who played Roger "Verbal" Kint. It was the perfect introduction. Even in a fine cast (Gabriel Byrne, Pete Postlethwaite, Benicio del Toro), Spacey shone out with his slippery essence – a quality that extends to his private life. The climactic close-up, showing him walking off his limp, was the moment when he went from a character actor to a star.

1995 Se7en Usually it's a measure of gigawattage when a superstar's cameo goes unbilled. Spacey, by no means yet a big name, argued for his exclusion from the credits to ratchet up his entrance as John Doe, a killer with a plain name inspired by the eponymous deadly sins. Smart move. Underplaying a divinely inspired wacko with sotto-voce stillness, shaven pate accentuating those trademark cheek grooves, Spacey announced himself as a sinuous and compelling cinematic presence.

1997 LA Confidential Spacey has a fluid physicality that he uses to express a character's inner essence. In this performance his loose limbs semaphored the loose morals of Sergeant Jack Vincennes, a clubbable, pink-jacketed narco cop in James Ellroy's Fifties LA who sells advice and tip-offs to a TV crime show. In an ensemble movie which made the careers of two Aussies (Russell Crowe, Guy Pearce), the native-Californian Spacey exuded a cocksure aura of Old Hollywood.



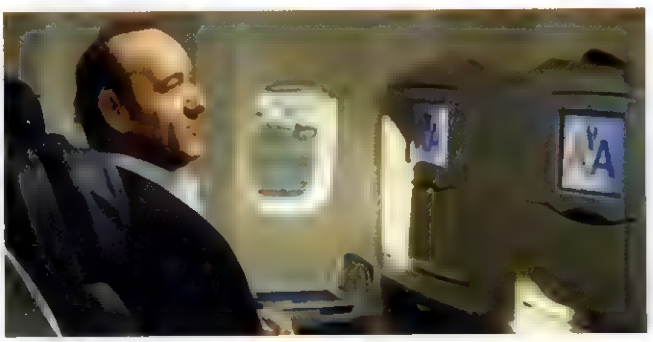
1998 The Iceman Cometh Spacey recommitted to the stage, his first love and natural home, initially at the Almeida in Howard Davies's epic revival of Eugene O'Neill's bleak and gruelling four-hour saga. As the hardware salesman Hickey, fresh off the bottle, Spacey was as if ignited within by fiery born-again conviction, never more than in his epic final monologue. On its award-hoarding way to Broadway, the production stopped off at the Old Vic. Its star eventually moved in for good.



1999 American Beauty The closest Spacey ever came to heroism. The film bagged him (and itself, and its first-time director Sam Mendes) an Oscar. As Lester Burnham, a regular guy whose sudden combustion features a young girl, a fast car, a faithless wife (Annette Bening, *pictured*) and much pumping of iron, Spacey delivered a painfully funny midlife crisis. Bang on 40 himself, he walked the line between self-exposure and narcissism. It takes a brave actor to hold up a mirror to American ugliness.

2006 A Moon for the Misbegotten Spacey's tenancy at the Old Vic had not started auspiciously. He had to cast himself in O'Neill's home banker to win round the critics. In his hands the alcoholic former actor Jim Tyrone had a driven, even locomotive force. Spacey played the thespian in him with a technical ostentation that trumpeted his dare-devilry more than his empathy. Audiences couldn't take their eyes off this plate-spinning turn. As a bonus, the show made a Broadway star of Eve Best (*pictured*).

2008 Speed-the-Plow David Mamet's classic depiction of corporate cynicism in Hollywood found Spacey in a world he knew well – indeed had escaped from. He and Jeff Goldblum (*pictured*) riffed and jived as omnipotent producers debating that old chestnut: art v commerce. Spacey punted for commerce with a feral conviction remarkable for the fact that his own best films had all happened the previous decade, before the pictures got small. The whole project had the sulphurous whiff of revenge programming.



2009- American Airlines ad campaign Spacey is one of Britain's favourite Americans, with a CBE for services to theatre – specifically a theatre once run by Olivier, where he is now inheriting one of Olivier's greatest roles. Richard III seduces a woman whose husband he has just murdered. It's called salesmanship. So is Spacey's endorsement of American Airlines (shot amid the red plush of the Old Vic, to make clear why he was doing it). But we'll forgive him: having helped to save a cultural institution, Spacey is becoming one himself.

Richard III *Old Vic, London. June 18th to September 11th*

REX ALL STAR RONALD GRANT LEBRECHT LEVINE PHOTOSTAGE ADVERTISING ARCHIVES

Word of memory stick

For decades Cubans have relied on the grapevine to know what's happening, and now this tendency has been given a technological twist. The novelist **James Scudamore**, a regular visitor, goes back to see how Havana is changing

SOMEHOW I'VE ENDED up helping to cater a party in Havana, and a burly, jovial architect called Rafael is asking me whether I've heard of Radio Bemba.

Basically it's the Cuban grapevine: "Bemba" is a slang word for big lips, and the expression has its origins in the way Fidel Castro communicated with his men in the 1950s when they were holed up in the Sierra Maestra building the revolution. Today, in a nation where the only official media are state-controlled, Radio Bemba has become shorthand for the word-of-mouth information network, which is by far the quickest (and often the most reliable) way to find out about anything from baseball chat to celebrity gossip to news of the latest defection to the United States.

The party food ran out a while ago, and someone has started DJ-ing from a laptop at one end of the apartment. Rafael adopts a suitably conspiratorial tone, even though the volume in the room is such that nobody could possibly hear us: "Listen," he says, leaning in, "I'll tell you something I bet you didn't know..."

I CAME TO Havana because the word on the international version of Radio Bemba has been that Cuba is changing, and that the process has been gathering pace since Fidel's younger brother Raúl took over as president in 2008. I wanted to see if the change was palpable – and if so, whether it was happening quickly enough to satisfy the people, and slowly enough to remain under control.

One of the most powerful indications that you had landed in Havana used to be the roadside billboards that in most countries would be prime advertising space, but here shouted out propaganda. On my last visit in 2008 these still railed against George Bush and his plans to Take Away All We Have Achieved. I remembered environmental ones – Look What This Stupid Capitalism Has Done To Our Planet – and topical ones calling for the release of Cubans held on espionage charges in the United States. But for all their pugnacity there were some persuasive slogans too, particularly in the areas of education and health care: Ten Million Children Die Every Year From Preventable Diseases: Not One Of Them Is Cuban.

Just killing time
ABOVE Taking a photo on a phone
OPPOSITE Waiting for food stamps at a distribution office in Havana

REUTERS/Vi

I had been looking forward to getting a reading on how the Castro regime was facing up to the world in 2011 from the posters on the way into town from the airport. But from the window of my rented Kia – not, I'm afraid, a Buick or a Chevrolet held together with rubber bands and Soviet parts – I noticed that something was different. Here were many things I remembered – a notable absence of cars; a concomitant prevalence of hitchhikers; fleets of full-to-bursting Yutong buses supplied by the Chinese – but there seemed to be a marked decline in the number of posters, and the ones I saw looked faded and old. The familiar slogans were still there (*Socialismo O Muerte! Venceremos!*), as were the images of Ernesto Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos – but they were getting considerably easier to ignore than the patina of history corroding them.

After I'd unpacked, I had a drink with Lázaro, which is not the real name of the guy I was unofficially renting my room from. He confirmed my suspicions.

"The posters get old and tatty, then they get taken down," he said. "And they don't get replaced."

"Is that because people no longer accept them?" I wondered. "Times are hard, and the government doesn't want to provoke?"

If a text message is a luxury you can't afford, a missed call is the next-best sign of affection

"Possibly," he replied. "And they cost far too much money to replace."

Talk to any Cuban under 35 and you'll find someone less politicised than they are frustrated, especially if they've had a drink and feel they can trust you. Their reaction to talk of the revolution is most likely to be boredom or discomfort – not necessarily because they fear the authorities might overhear them, but simply because they want to get on, and this stuff is just so old. Cubans are long-suffering and they seem to be infinitely resourceful, but sometimes they feel it's about time someone gave them a break.

These cracks of patience run parallel to a meandering official party line: as the rules start to change, so the people begin to glimpse what they have been deprived of. It's as if they have been gripped so tightly for so long that they are only just beginning to notice that there might be a little room for manoeuvre.

I walked down Obispo, a busy shopping street in Old Havana. A water truck was being shouted at with rising urgency as it threatened to reverse into a cement mixer outside a building site. The truck was a familiar sight – water management is a round-the-clock concern since the mains supply reaches many

houses only every other day – but the sight of workers saving one of those ubiquitous, rotting colonial façades felt refreshingly new. And that wasn't all.

Here were the usual *jineteros* out to hustle whatever they could from passing tourists, some pitching low with the promise of cheap cigars, others trying on more baroque tales in the hope of a bigger pay-off. Here were elegant ladies done up in the white finery of the *Santería* devotee, waiting to be asked to pose for photos. But there were also many locals peering down at and fiddling with their mobile phones.

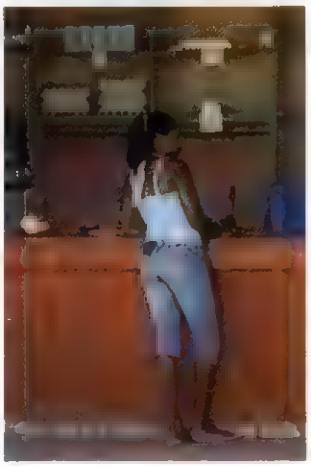
I was in Cuba three years ago when the freshly appointed President Raúl Castro relaxed certain restrictions forbidding the ownership of electrical goods and prohibiting Cubans from entering the best hotels. Overnight, the coffin-shaped pool built by mob-boss Meyer Lansky at the Hotel Riviera turned from a quiet dunking place for broiled foreigners into a seething cacophony of local kids diving from the high board and devouring slices of pizza in the shallow end. And overnight, people started openly toting their phones.

So I wasn't surprised to see that they were now everywhere – or even that all the latest handsets were on display, in spite of the fact that Cubans can't access a data network (foreign SIM cards can, at a traumatic price). What amazed me was that anybody could afford to use them. In convertible pesos, calls cost around 40c per minute, so given that the average monthly salary is about $25, you could blow a month's pay in about an hour. What was everybody up to?

The answer to that question, which came from a friend of Lázaro's called Gloria, provided the most up-to-date example I had seen of how beautifully adaptable Cubans are to the parameters set by their capricious controllers. If a text message is a luxury you can't afford, then a missed call is the next-best sign of affection. It's understood that Gloria won't answer the phone when her boyfriend calls. The idea is just to let her know she's on his mind.

SOMEONE TOLD ME that if I really wanted to understand how Cuba was changing I should visit Papito the hairdresser. I ended up in a quiet Old Havana street of shuttered houses in varying states of repair. Some were literally falling down, but there was building work in progress here, too: further evidence of the restoration programme that is bringing some of the near-mortally neglected buildings back to life.

I reached what I thought must be Papito's door. Two chickens caged under an upturned crate clucked gently on the cobbles outside. Some kids who had been playing baseball in the street capered past me up some crumbling stone steps and into an adjacent doorway.



Spreading the word
OPPOSITE Talking by a tree that has grown through a wall
TOP Passing an old poster which shows George Bush as a vampire
ABOVE Shopping for food: fine if you want eggs

At the end of the street I could make out the imposing shadow of a statue of General Máximo Gómez on his horse. Behind it, Atlantic spray shot up in the air over the cars that puttered up and down the Malecón.

The salon would be discreet (there is no sign) were it not for the plaque outside the front door that commemorates what Gilberto Valladares Reina, known to all as "Papito", has done for this neighbourhood – which gives you a clue that he's more than your average barber. Climb the creaking stairs to his first-floor premises and you begin to get the picture. This is not just a salon, but also a commissioning art gallery (the theme is hairdressing). It's also a museum of social history, showcasing ancient cameras and typewriters (and hairdressing equipment) that might still be in service elsewhere in Havana, but have here been accumulated and displayed for their historical interest. And it's also a hairdressing school.

"Hairdressing is what saved me," says Papito, who is gym-built and charismatic, and sports a bewilderingly complicated utility-belt of hair-related tools. "I hated school. I ran away a lot. I got into trouble. And if someone hadn't taught me this trade I think I would be in worse trouble right now. So I wanted others to benefit from the advantages I had."

He currently has 11 pupils, all recruited from the deprived streets immediately surrounding the salon. He's already opened a second salon across the street where his students can train, and, in a third building, a second art gallery that also doubles as a community gym. In a way he's a kind of magnate, with two crucial distinctions: first, every one of his premises has at least two different uses; second, every one of his businesses benefits the community at large. Which might explain why, after initial suspicion, the state has so enthusiastically sanctioned his projects.

"If they see that this kind of social enterprise works, and that it's good for the community, they'll be better prepared for the next thing that comes along," he says. "But they need to be shown the examples." >

At ease
A member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces gets her hair done

> This is trailblazing stuff. Cuba nationalised retail business in 1968, after which any form of private enterprise, from renting out a room in your house to selling bananas from a barrow, could be deemed "speculation". Everybody broke the rules, because you couldn't not if you wanted to survive, but if you were dobbed in by a "reliable source" you were in trouble. However, since late 2010, and facing public-sector redundancies, the government has been tentatively encouraging small-scale private enterprise. Things are moving slowly, partly because old bureaucratic habits die hard (the red tape is excruciating), but now you can apply for a licence to run a coffee shop or a snack bar that will be more than just a workers' collective.

People call the protean language of the regime *Granmática* (*Granma* being the state newspaper that is named after the implausible little pleasure boat that brought Fidel, Che and 80 other revolutionaries over from Mexico to start the revolution). And the expression favoured by *Granmática* when the issue of reform comes up is "updating the revolution". It is reform born of necessity: changes are made not because the regime wants to make them, but because it has to. That Cuban resourcefulness extends from those in high office stretching their definition of what revolution actually means, to people like Papito, who will benefit most from the new entrepreneurial spirit because they're the ones most prepared to test its limits. As so often before, Cubans are evolving, and adapting, and making the best of the situation. They have, after all, known worse times than these.

BACK TO THAT party: it's not large, just a Friday evening get-together that a friend of a friend organises at home for his college friends. (The apartment is also home to his mother, his grandmother, his sister and her boyfriend – leaving home is off the cards when there's nowhere to move to.) Guests are both students and teachers, of every discipline from physics to music to literature. The reason I had a hand in setting up the party was that I offered to buy supplies when I was in town, knowing the possible difficulties.

Getting hold of food can be complicated, particularly if you want to buy something not listed on your ration card. As I had discovered when trying to buy light bulbs for Lázaro as a practical thank-you present, you have to develop a shopping strategy, trawling from one market to another, following rumours. And often the response is still the same as the one often seen on restaurant menus: *No Hay*.

I'd bagged a reasonable haul of crisps and crackers from a tourist shop, and some ham and cheese to put on them. When that runs out the rum is going strong, and our hostess, ever resourceful, has soon rustled up a delicious snack of *chícharos*, deep-fried split pea fritters. That's when I get talking to Rafael the architect.

"*Chícharos*," he says, almost wistfully. "You know, we virtually lived on these things during the Special Period. I won't go so far as to say that anybody actually starved, but at times we weren't far off."

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba entered a period of austerity that Fidel referred to as "The Special Period In A Time Of Peace." The economy caved in: Soviet Oil had provided 90% of the country's energy, which was instantly withdrawn along with all its other supplies of raw materials, food and fertiliser. Even the wheat had been arriving on tankers from the USSR. Books were printed on whatever scrap paper was lying around. Sugar mills, whose product had been bought for years at comically inflated prices, were decommissioned (and are now rusting into full dereliction). Power cuts and severe food shortages ensued, which precipitated the regime's decision to set out its stall to tourists, turn to subsistence farming and dollarise the economy.

Memories of this time die hard, and contribute (along with continued hardship, particularly when it comes to having enough to eat) to a constant low-level anxiety about food and a suspicion of neo-liberal globalisation. Letting in the dollar stratified society: because the possibility now existed for money to come in from the outside, it meant that for the first time since the revolution a person's lifestyle was not indexed to his contribution. Rafael takes up the story.

"So," he says. "Your brother in Miami sends you $100 a month, which is far more than you have ever been paid for working." (Rafael makes around $300 a year.) "Not only do you not have to work – you also have a much higher standard of living than those who do. Lifestyles are changed overnight. The one who

"Your brother in Miami sends you $100 a month... Lifestyles are changed overnight"

AURORA VII

works is worse off than the one who doesn't."

This is how the system gets broken. Suddenly the car-parking attendant or the couch potato is making five times more money than the teacher or the surgeon. It's why all the main sources of income if you want a decent standard of living in modern Cuba involve foreigners: either you rent out your body, or you rent out a room in your house, or you're sent money from a relative in Miami. And because Miami Cubans tend to be white, their remittances never reach the black population, which reinforces a certain pre-existing level of racial inequality.

"There never used to be street gangs here, because people didn't feel socially excluded," says Rafael. "But now they do. Here I am: your neighbour. I see you going into the dollar shop. I see your children eating chocolate. Our children go to the same school and they eat the same miserable lunch every day. So we take them a snack. I can only afford a roll of bread. But your children have fizzy drinks and sandwiches. That's what has happened to Cuban society. It is fractured into two levels. And now there is discontent."

Listening to Rafael reminds me of all the countless stories I've heard of what that discontent has made people do over the years. It's become a truism to say that the pain of the Cuban situation is closer to that of a blood feud than a political struggle. Most families have been divided in some way by the constant exodus, and whether those who make the jump find a way to do it safely, or resort to the perilous journey of the *balseros* who flee every year in their thousands on makeshift rafts and boats, once they have made it across they have picked a side simply by virtue of geography. Uniquely, thanks to the "wet foot/dry foot" policy, if a Cuban national sets foot on American soil he or she is instantly entitled to a passport.

Historically, the position of the Miami Cubans has tended to be defined by a vocal and politically powerful group violently opposed to any dismantling of the American embargo, afraid that it might bring the kind of embourgeoisement that would make the Castros stronger. But as I listen to Rafael I'm also reminded of something Lázaro told me earlier in the week, which makes me think that there could be one possible advantage to this being a family feud: the kids the next generation down might one day run into their cousins and wonder what all the fuss was about.

Under relaxed restrictions since the start of the Obama administration, the number of Cuban-Americans making the trip from Miami has increased since 2008 to over 1,000 per day. Lázaro tells me that when his relatives come over, any disputes between the groups are more likely to be based on envy than enmity: "The exiles envy the locals because we all seem to sit around all day doing nothing. Meanwhile we see them breezing in here, trying to sell us a pair of trainers that we know is last year's model, and we think, What have you got to complain about? You're free."

Not quite the level of venom that has traditionally characterised the discourse across the Florida Straits. These two sides aren't so much trading political views as ripped off PlayStation games and pirated episodes of South Park. And they are talking to each other.

Which brings us back to Radio Bemba. Rafael and I are talking about how word gets around, and when the conversation turns to the internet, I speculate how difficult it must be with so few opportunities to get online, and the crippling expense when you do. "Next you're going to tell me you haven't heard of the Cuban internet," says my new friend. I shake my head. And that's when he starts talking about Radio Bemba. People chip in with examples: According to Radio Bemba, there's pork at the market on 23 and 12. Radio Bemba says that an official in the Ministry of Education has been fired. Fidel is in hospital, if you believe Radio Bemba. "And so, what do you suppose is the most useful object in a Cuban's life right now?" says Rafael. "I'll tell you: it's his USB stick."

That's right: Radio Bemba has gone digital. Only about 2% of Cubans can get online (although that could change thanks to the recent arrival of a fibre-optic cable from *compañero* Chávez in Venezuela), but it doesn't matter. You don't need the internet to get Radio Bemba. The news may be a little stale by the time you read it, but it gets around. Whole stacks of HTML files from news websites are dumped onto USB drives, brought into the country, and disseminated from person to person. The thumb drive and the data DVD have become the media of choice here for the same reason that the tape deck lived on in Cuba long after its obsolescence elsewhere. They're how that DJ on the laptop at the end of the room got hold of all his music, just as they're how Rafael gets hold of his news.

"In January 2010," he says, "26 mental patients died in the Havana Psychiatric Hospital on a very cold night. But the story didn't initially get any play at all in the state media, because health care is such a proud pillar of the revolution. How did we know?"

"Radio Bemba," I say, as others join the chorus. Rafael looks around with pleasure at his gathering audience, and suddenly his tone is not so conspiratorial.

"It could be anything," he says. "Something fascist. Something destabilising. Or it could just be a recipe, a piece of music or a film." He smiles, and pops another *chícharo* fritter in his mouth. "The point is that all it takes is one person." ■

Make do and mend
An elderly man repairs a bed, using clothes hangers

SEVEN WONDERS

Salman Rushdie

Few living authors have elicited stronger reactions than Salman Rushdie, now 63. "Midnight's Children" was voted Best of the Booker winners; "The Satanic Verses" triggered a fatwa that sent him into hiding for a decade. His own favourites are his children's books. Here he discusses the places that mean the most to him

▲ CITY **BOMBAY**

I still refuse to call it "Mumbai", as do many people who live there. It's not ancient like Delhi, with thousands of years of history – essentially it's a city the British built because they thought the natural harbour would be useful to the navy. They reclaimed land to join together seven islands into what is now the peninsula of south Bombay, then they built a fort and the city grew around it. Marine Drive, along with South Beach Miami, is the longest stretch of Art Deco architecture in the world. When I was growing up I thought that Art Deco was a local Indian style, and I was really disappointed when I got to the West and discovered they had it too! Bombay is India's most cosmopolitan city, because it stands on the border between north and south India, and faces to the West where historically most of the rest of the world connected with it. You get every kind of Indian person – whereas in Delhi you mostly meet north Indian people, in Calcutta mostly Bengali, in Madras mostly Tamil – and there are also a lot of non-Indian people, so it's a genuine, exciting metropolis.

▼ BEACH **NORTH-WEST MAURITIUS**

In 1988, when I finished writing "The Satanic Verses", I went to Mauritius – it was my after-the-book holiday. I stayed at the Royal Palm and the beach there is very beautiful. I generally get bored on beaches, but I love the sensation when you walk off the beach into the water and there's no change of temperature, there's just wet around you instead of air. I hadn't realised that so much of the population of Mauritius was of Indian origin, brought there by the British and French as indentured labourers 14 or 15 generations ago. When they discovered that I was actually from India, it was as if I'd said I came from paradise, and people became incredibly friendly and curious and opened their homes to me. So it was an unusually fantastic beach holiday, where instead of being just a tourist going for sun and drinks with umbrellas in them, I was allowed to become part of the place, just because of an accident of heritage.

▲ JOURNEY **LONDON TO KARACHI**

When I'd just graduated from Cambridge in 1968, an English friend of mine who had a Mini Traveller decided he was going to drive it to India, and his mother begged me to go along because – although he was a good driver – he was rather unworldly and she thought if I didn't go with him, he'd die. My parents, rather courageously, said I could go – they didn't know where I was for two months. It's an indication of how different the world was then, that you could get into a car in London and drive across the world, across Iran and Afghanistan. The car broke down on a deserted road in eastern Iran, and I had to hail gigantic trucks and find enough Farsi to persuade them to tow us to the next town. The guy who did was very helpful; took us to where we could get the car repaired, then got his mates to surround us and took all our money.

REX MOTORING PICTURE LIBRARY AURORA CAMERA PRESS ALAMY ART ARCHIVE

PLACE: KANYAKUMARI, INDIA

The southernmost tip of India, which used to be known as Cape Comorin, has now reverted to the name Kanyakumari. It's a bit touristy, with all kinds of stalls selling memorabilia, but the first time I went there I managed to find a point to stand on where it looks as if three oceans were colliding with each other: the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Great Southern Ocean which stretches all the way to Antarctica. Most beautiful views are a little too pleased with themselves; they just sit there and look back at you and they are beautiful in exactly the same way every day. This one was so dynamic, so busy "being", that it didn't care who was watching, and the way the waves smashed into each other was never the same twice.

HOTEL: THE DANIELI, VENICE

When my first wife and I got married, we went to Venice on honeymoon, and we were so relatively poor at the time that we couldn't afford to go in to fancy places like the Danieli or the Gritti Palace, even for a cup of coffee, so we just looked at them from the outside. More recently I have stayed at the Danieli – and had coffee – and I thought "thanks a lot; this will do!" I think it's the nicest hotel I've ever been in. The Gritti has the advantage of being on the Grand Canal, but the Danieli has an amazing view and is near interesting buildings like the Doge's Palace. I'm choosing it because I can remember being young and coveting it, so now I can go there I really value it.

BUILDING: TAJ MAHAL, AGRA

It seems a little obvious to choose the Taj Mahal, but I was very struck when I took my two sons there how their response to it was the same as mine had been when I first saw it. That wasn't until I was an adult (even though I grew up in India, we somehow never went to Agra) and so like everyone else I'd just seen a million reproductions – photographs, calendars, biscuit tins...And the thing that impressed me was how much more extraordinary it was than any representation of it, in a way that you wouldn't say about, for example, the Mona Lisa, which seems disappointing when you see it. I was stunned that when you see this very familiar object, it's as if you'd never seen it before. Modern thinking says that the constant reproduction of an image devalues the orginal. But with the Taj, the original exceeds all the reproductions.

WORK OF ART: GOYA'S BLACK PAINTINGS

This room in the Prado is the most extraordinary I've been to in any gallery or museum anywhere in the world – I've spent hours sitting in it looking at these slightly deranged paintings which Goya did late in his life when he was, I think, out of his mind. He actually did them as panels for his house – it must have made a gloomy place these very dark pictures of goats and black Sabbaths and Saturn devouring his children are not the cheeriest stuff to put on the walls of your home. If I had to choose just one, it would be this Witches' Sabbath.

Sir Salman Rushdie was talking to Rebecca Wallis. ***Luka and the Fire of Life*** is published in paperback in June

BEING THERE

Atlanta

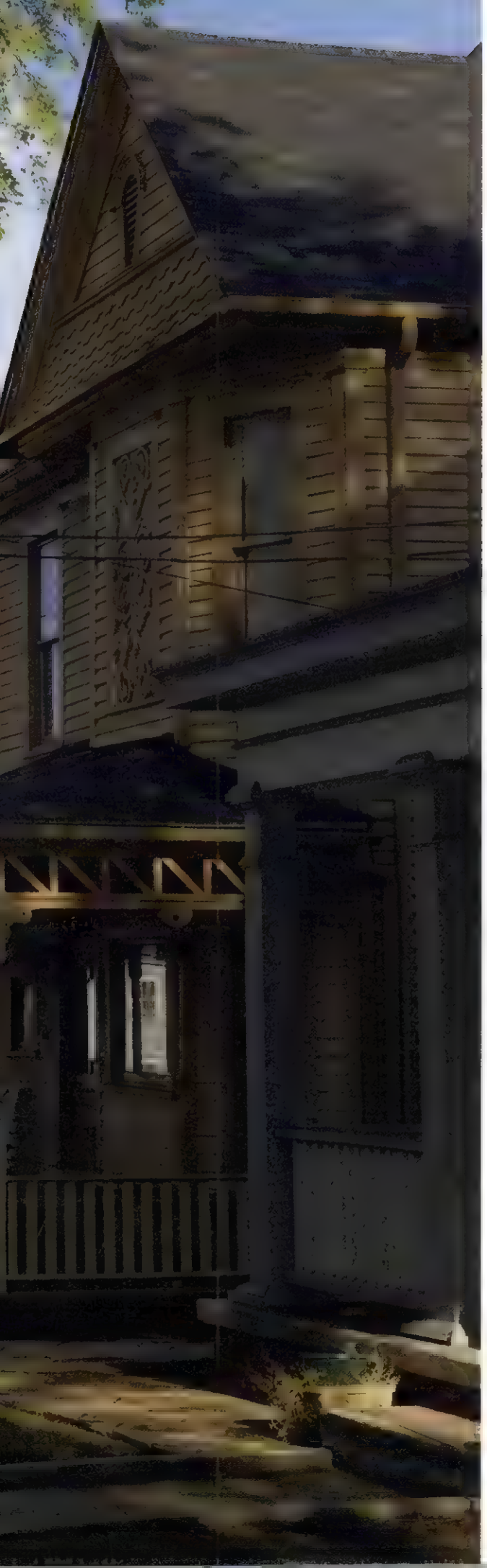
It presents an anonymous face to the world, and when he was posted there by *The Economist*, **Jon Fasman** faced some tricky negotiations. But life in Atlanta has been a happy surprise

If I were ever convicted of murder and sentenced to die, the walk on my execution day from cell to chair would feel only marginally longer than the walk I made, not quite two years ago, from my old subway station to my house to tell my wife – a New Englander by heritage and a Parisian-New Yorker in sensibility – that I had been offered, and was inclined to accept, a job that would move us to Atlanta. We had a 15-month-old son and had just bought a house, our first, in Washington, DC, where I grew up and which she had grown to like.

What did she know – what did either of us know – about Atlanta? There is no defining Atlanta novel (Tom Wolfe's "A Man in Full" comes closest, but it was not one of his hits) or film (the antebellum Atlanta of "Gone with the Wind" no longer exists). Like San Antonio or Phoenix, it is one of the sprawling, under-represented American cities. We knew it once hosted the Olympics, has a vast airport, lots of corporate headquarters, Martin Luther King's church, terrible traffic and a baseball team that manages to be perpetually successful yet largely devoid of style or flavour. Beyond that it was a huge blank, even more association-free than San Antonio (cowboy hats, the Alamo) or Phoenix (cactus). We knew it was in the south, though, so there would be broad front porches, preferably with swings, and sweating glasses of sweet tea and mint juleps.

The weekend after we moved down, it snowed. Not much – an inch or two over a full day – but it shut the city down. Something similar but worse happened this year: a three-inch storm coupled with a week of below-freezing temperatures shut the city down for nearly a week. Different cities are suited to different seasons: a few years back I was posted to Moscow, which blooms in the winter and wilts in summer. New

A small-town big city
Even quite central parts of Atlanta have a rural feel



York's summer days are repulsive -- walking outside feels like swimming through garbage soup -- but there is no place I'd rather spend a summer evening. Atlanta is built for spring and fall -- the pleasant seasons, and Atlanta is a profoundly pleasant city.

That is not as easy as it seems. New York is thrilling, Hong Kong a marvel of density, Moscow the closest a city can get to a cocaine level of jitteriness and excitement, London endless: I love all four places, but I would never describe them as pleasant. They are none of them as comfortable and human-scaled as Atlanta. Social life just sort of happens here. In New York and London my calendar filled up weeks in advance; here it is not unusual to look forward to a relaxing, empty weekend on Thursday and then find that Saturday and Sunday are frantic.

Some of that may be conditional – in New York and London I was childless; now I'm the father of two young children, who seem to have been sent here to be our social secretaries. As the weather turns warm, an informal circuit emerges among similarly harried but happy parents: late-afternoon barbecues and weekend outings to community gardens – tracts of vacant land tucked away in urban neighbourhoods and cultivated by enterprising locals. My son is especially fond of one with a couple of rope swings and some goats and chickens: it's invisible from the street but immense, like an Arab courtyard.

Atlanta is built for spring and fall – the pleasant seasons. It's a profoundly pleasant city

And I have discovered that kids bring out the native southern warmth of Atlantans. A few weeks ago I took my older boy to the grocery store. At the checkout he was sitting in the cart, and the cashier looked at him and asked how he was doing. He considered for a moment and then said, "Umm...not so good." The cashier looked not at him but at me – stupid me with my mouth open and my eyebrows raised. He'd seemed fine to me not ten seconds earlier. She asked what was wrong. He shook his head slowly, cupping his hand to his forehead as no doubt he'd seen his father do many times before. "I had a bad day," he said mournfully. "I didn't get to have a cookie." From some unidentified spot behind the cash register, out came a cookie, a balloon and a sticker. Now the place >

Going native

WHERE TO STAY

The **Westin Peachtree** is a city landmark: a 73-storey black cylinder looming over downtown with mirrored windows, a number of which are flat black after a tornado in 2008.

If you need to be in Buckhead and you want to avoid the parking lots that are Highways 75 and 400, try the **Ritz-Carlton Buckhead**

For low-key southern charm check out the **Sugar Magnolia Bed and Breakfast**, in a yellow Victorian mansion on a quiet street in Inman Park.

WHERE TO EAT

The Star Provisions complex on the Westside houses Atlanta's top fine-dining spot, **Bacchanalia**, as well as the meat-centric **Abattoir**, nouveau-southern **JCT Kitchen** and first-rate sandwiches from **Star Provisions**

For old-school southern fare, head for **Mary Mac's Tea Room** or **The Colonnade**, both more renowned for what they represent than for the food, which is variable. For a barbecue, it has to be either **Fox Brothers** (*below*), **Harold's** or **Fat Matt's Rib Shack**

Adventurous diners should drive out on Buford Highway, where restaurants and shops cater to Atlanta's immense immigrant population. You'll find first-rate >

> Korean, Vietnamese and Bangladeshi restaurants, as well as regional Mexican fare.

STREETWISE

Atlanta is car-centric, but not as hostile to pedestrians as, say, Houston or Los Angeles. If you're here for more than a couple of days, rent a car and a GPS – the public-transport system, the MARTA, will get you from the airport to downtown but is otherwise inadequate. Parking is plentiful and driving easy, as long as you stay off the main roads and highways from 7 to 9.30am and 4 to 6.30pm.

WHAT TO SEE

The **Georgia Aquarium** is pricey but worth a visit, especially with kids. Steer well clear of **World of Coca-Cola**, as cloying as the beverage it pimps, but be sure to visit the **Botanical Gardens**, which abut Piedmont Park.

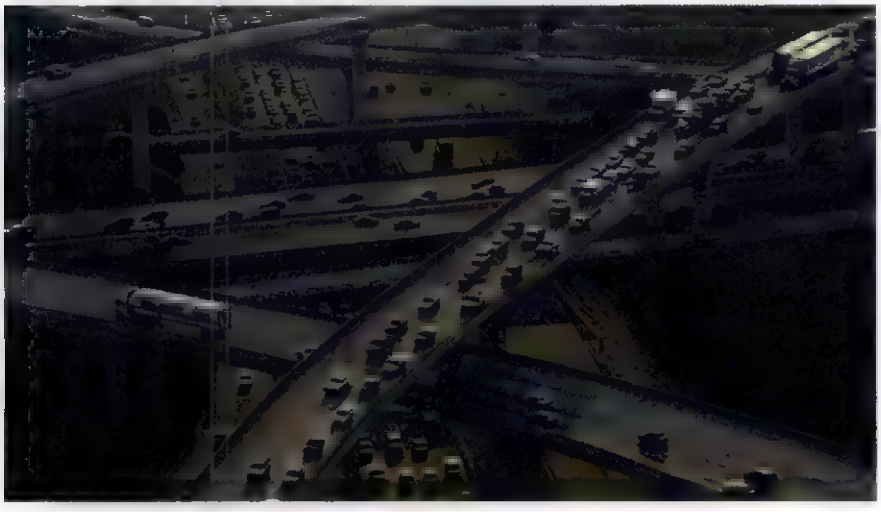
WHERE TO SHOP

You can find all the chains you want at **Perimeter**, **Lenox** and **Peachtree** malls. That said, there are plenty of independent boutiques dotted around Virginia-Highland, West Midtown and Decatur. For food shopping head to the hangar-sized, bargain-priced **Dekalb Farmers Market**, in Decatur.

> I call the grocery store he calls the balloon store. And thus began a successful career as a toddler con-artist.

The grocery-balloon store sits behind the Majestic Diner, a local landmark nearly a century old. Hardly anything is older here. Atlanta was a railroad city, and in 1864, at the end of the American civil war, General William Sherman conquered it for the Union and burned it to the ground. It was swiftly rebuilt; as befits a railroad city, Atlanta has always been about trade, business, enterprise – the hustle. And if that fact robs it of the stately southern charm of Savannah or Charleston, it also did much to protect it from the worst excesses of reaction during the turbulent mid-60s, and made it a bastion of openness and tolerance in the South (not to mention a springtime blessing for those of us allergic to both Spanish moss and antebellum nostalgia). It's true that you can go days without hearing a southern accent here, and when you do, as often as not it's someone from Mississippi or Alabama who moved to Atlanta – a transplant like the rest of us.

Yet this is still a southern city, the first one I've ever lived in. I grew up in the north-east and spent my professional life either there or abroad. From London and New York I learned to be quick and often brusque in my daily encounters with strangers – cashiers, bus drivers and the like. That does not fly in Atlanta, where civility implies at least a few seconds of courtesy time. From working as a journalist in Washington, DC, I grew used to ritually combative interviews in which academic and professional qualifications were brandished like so many peacock feathers. Here the ruse is different: when I first moved here I interviewed a couple of political figures who were off-puttingly polite and warm, cracking jokes and asking about my family and background and how I like Atlanta, helpfully recommending neighbourhoods, schools for my two young sons and restaurants. Only after I hung up did I realise that I'd just lived through a mugging by Autolycus, the crafty pickpocket who plays a bumpkin in the sheep-shearing scene in "The Winter's Tale": they answered none of my questions. I hasten to add, not least because I assume that the people who pay me a salary to get answers to impertinent questions will be reading this, that I've developed a defence against this tactic: dogged persistence, even when the person on the other end of the line does that southern short-intake-of-breath-then-sigh thing that lets you know you're being incredibly rude.



Wheels within wheels
ABOVE A 1957 Buick Special in the Lake Claire neighbourhood
BELOW Atlanta's very own Spaghetti Junction

From a born-and-bred Atlanta friend I learned that this practice is called playing "country dumb", and you only fall for it once or twice. It's not the only aspect of rural life that crops up unexpectedly here. My mailing address is Atlanta; I live on the city's eastern edge, but my neighbourhood feels surprisingly like a small town. Houses in my area tend to be small, bungalow-style or shotgun-shack affairs, with front porches, shuttered windows and large, shambolic backyards. From my desk I can look out of the window and admire the five-centuries-old (at least) oak trees in my yard. I can walk to a little cluster of shops.

Londoners and New Yorkers will have to take my word for how unusual this is in American cities.

PHOTOGRAPH A. RORA

Atlantans divide the area into "ITP" and "OTP" – Inside the Perimeter and Outside the Perimeter, the highway that rings the city and its closest suburbs. Most of the area's population is O; most of its charms are decidedly I. One quirk of Atlanta's development is that urban areas like mine feel rather rustic, while suburbs that were rural 30 years ago are now strip-malled, parking-lotted and planned-communitied into blacktopped uniformity. For all its charms, Atlanta provides an object lesson for mid-sized cities today in how not to grow. It sprawls, it really does have bad traffic, and thanks to a befuddling stew of overlapping city and county governments, it has negligible public transport and dysfunctional state schools. Better to treat the perimeter as a national border, and cross it only on trips abroad.

And yet, and yet: there is still much to like. We were on a walk a few days back, exchanging greetings with the mom and her triplets from across the street, the raggedy man who pushes a grocery cart full of unclassifiable odds and ends, a set of neighbours, one fixing his car and the other painting his eaves. Spring bloomed early; it was warm. "I think I like it here," my wife said, a propos of nothing and everything.

Both urban and rural, heterogeneous, affordable, architecturally interesting: it was her ideal, she said, and she could see us staying for a long time. I couldn't help but smile. I had expended no small amount of marital capital in moving us down here, and had considered it spent. Perhaps it was invested instead. ■

Accommodation!

Some film-makers live in hotels, others end up owning them. Claire Wrathall focuses on six of the best

Blancaneaux Lodge, Belize
The Mountain Pine Ridge Forest in Belize reminded Francis Ford Coppola of the "jungle paradise" in the Philippines where he shot "Apocalypse Now", so he bought a dilapidated estate, deep in its dark heart on the steep banks of the Privassion river, which he dammed to create electricity and a swimming pool. Twelve years later, in 1993, he turned it into a rustic-luxe hotel – six thatched *casitas*, seven villas on stilts. It's an idyllic retreat which hosts writers' workshops every year. In Villa 7, where Coppola himself stays, is a wall hung with family snaps, notably one featuring a teenage Sofia Coppola with her father and her cousin Nicolas Cage. *Doubles from $274 b&b; www.coppolaresorts.com*

Les Manoirs de Tourgéville, France
So taken was Claude Lelouch by the Normandy landscape around Deauville, where he shot his 1966 classic "Un homme et une femme", that he decided to build himself a traditional Norman manor house nearby. He subsequently opened it as a hotel which became the place to stay during the annual American Film Festival. Now part of Groupe Floirat, which owns St Tropez's Hotel Byblos, it reopened last summer with five unusual ring-shaped annexes containing 57 rooms, each named after a French or American actor. There's also a 50-seat cinema. *Doubles from €140; www.lesmanoirsdetourgeville.com*

Chateau Marmont, Los Angeles
This is West Hollywood's movie hotel *par excellence*, a fantastical 1920s castle and grounds modelled on Château d'Amboise in the Loire. Billy Wilder and Fritz Lang were long-stay guests, but it's most associated with Nicholas Ray, who moved into Bungalow 2 after his divorce from Gloria Grahame in 1952 and was still there when his "Rebel without a Cause" was released in 1955. Indeed, the set for the James Dean character's family house was based on the bungalow, so Ray could rehearse his cast at home, as it were. Now owned by the hip hotelier André Balazs, it remains cool, laidback, resolutely retro – and a movie-star haunt to this day. *Doubles from $473; www.chateaumarmont.com*

Hotel Chelsea, New York, and the Dorchester, London
Arthur C. Clarke wrote the screenplay for "2001: A Space Odyssey" while living at New York's famous though modest Chelsea Hotel (it reversed its name in 2007). The film's director, Stanley Kubrick – a man for whom hotels had some significance: think of "The Shining" – chose rather different lodgings. He and his family moved into a suite at the ever-opulent Dorchester for the duration of the epic shoot, which began in Borehamwood in 1965 and finally wrapped at Elstree in December 1967. No wonder the film went $4.5m over its $6m budget. *Hotel Chelsea: studio with shared bath from $106; www.hotelchelsea.com; The Dorchester: doubles from £318; www.thedorchester.com*

Moulin du Jardinier, France
Three years after finishing "A Passage to India", David Lean came across a ruined 15th-century mill in the hills above the Côte d'Azur. It took him two years to transform it into a palatial villa fit for a movie mogul (the master bedroom has two bathrooms). There are seven acres of gardens, plus a heated pool, half-tennis court and staff. *From €12,500 a week (sleeps nine); www.sjvillas.co.uk*

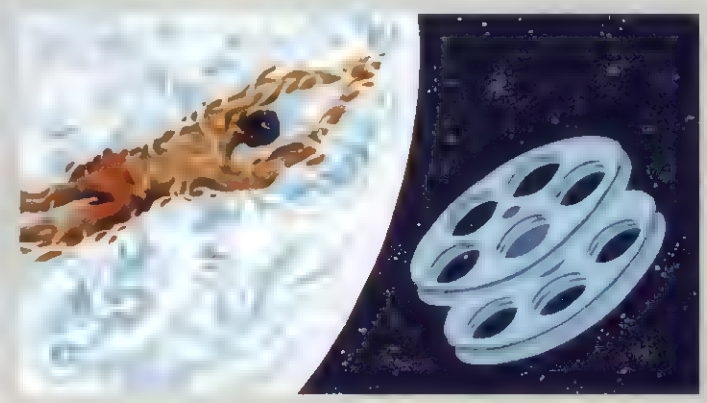


ILLUSTRATION NEIL GOWER

SNAPSHOT

Skaftafell National Park, Iceland

It is the crunching of tectonic plates, not of credit, that makes Iceland so photogenic – as many travellers learnt under the ash cloud last year, it sits on the boundary between the North American and the Eurasian plates. This armadillo-scaled rock at Svartifoss (Black Fall) in Skaftafell National Park is a close relation of the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland. The hexagonal basalt columns formed inside a lava flow which cooled slowly and allowed crystallisation. In geological terms Iceland is very young, still being formed and changed by fire and ice – hence its popularity with human adolescents, who flock here on school field trips to see their textbooks on volcanic activity brought to life (not least in the Geysir after which all other geysers are named). David Short, who took this picture, feels that Iceland lends itself to photography with its "alien scenery of barren, lunar landscapes, mushrooming, soft rocks covered in heather, and immense, monolithic rock formations". It also lends itself to supernatural interpretation – Iceland's population of 320,000 is famously open-minded about the "huldufolk" or invisible people who also live there, in the curiously shaped hills and rocks. These elves, trolls and dwarves have their roots, like the tales of J.R.R. Tolkien, in the Nordic sagas of the 13th century, and must have arisen to make sense of the fantastical landscape. Even today, the Roads Authority has occasion to negotiate with elves, through a medium, if its road-building plans involve the destruction of an elf-dwelling – otherwise the bulldozers have a habit of breaking down. That is why some roads in Iceland take a sudden turn for no obvious reason. When the environment has a personality, it seems to command more respect. Environmental campaigners of the world, take note. ~ REBECCA WILLIS

PHOTOGRAPH *DAVID SHORT*

My nemesis and I

How hard can it be, becoming a tour guide? **Will Smith** finds out

"HERE WE SEE stained-glass images of the Tudor rose, alongside a pomegranate – the heraldic symbol of Catherine of Aragon – and a portcullis, which was..." I am about to say "the badge of Henry VIII, later adopted by people who served the crown, and still found today on the letterheads of British MPs." But I'm interrupted.

"It's our football team!" I look round. A ten-year-old boy is beaming.

"He's right," nods his teacher. "It's the logo for Borough Green FC."

I am giving a tour of the medieval manorhouse Ightham Mote to a class of Kent schoolchildren, and it's not going well. My opening salvo bombed. "What might that building have been?"

A boy's hand shot up. "Stables!"

"Correct," I said – and, feeling on a roll, added: "How do you know that?"

"Because they told us last time," came the heart-stopping reply. I panicked: there was now a strong possibility my factual titbits would be pre-empted at each of the remaining nine locations of the tour. But I knew that, like a chancellor presenting a leaked budget, I had no option but to stick lamely to my spiel.

I'd spent the morning cramming with Pat, a guide with 15 years' experience who had recommended asking questions to engage the audience. But this has backfired, so it's with some apprehension that I ask which part of the manor is the oldest. Thankfully they all plump for the wooden-beamed Tudor section. With resurgent confidence, I put them right: "No, it's actually the Great Hall." Eager to divest some recently imbibed facts about medieval building styles, I then ask them to explain their erroneous reasoning.

"The one-handed clock!" pipes a girl.

I look up. There's a clock. With one hand. Pat didn't mention the clock. Lacking a clock fact, I struggle to resist the cardinal sin of tour guidance: improvisation. As the children follow my mumbled entreaty to move into the hall, I downgrade my retirement plan – from National Trust volunteer who guides tours, to National Trust volunteer who sits in a corner and answers questions about toilet locations. Then I'm disgusted by my own defeatism. For this column I've faced down gorillas and trained as a cage-fighter. Surely I can win over a bunch of kids in a stately home?

I pull out a killer statistic, praying no one's heard it on any previous tours. "How much do you think the manor cost in 1521?" The first guess comes in at £50,000, and bids peak at £50m. Wrong! £400. Jaws drop. I follow up: "What could you buy today for £400 that you could live in? Maybe a shed!" I pause for the laugh; it doesn't come. Instead the yawning gap is filled by the same child who remembered that the cottages used to be stables. "A TV."

This kid is trouble. This kid is my nemesis. Time to shut him down. "You couldn't live in a TV," I retort.

"I could, I'd hollow it out and live in the back..."

"Wouldn't work," I cut in. "TVs now are all flat-screen, they're too narrow to live in." Everyone is looking at me in silence. Not just the kids and the teacher, but also the other visitors. All of them clearly wondering why I'd want to crush, with such withering rationality, a child's idle fantasy about living in a TV.

I take this silence as newfound deference to my authority. This is immediately torpedoed by the interruption to my patter on Tudor heraldry. By the same kid. Then I realise that his smile is good-natured and he's not trying to trip me up. In fact, he's doing my job for me: relating history to his own life. I explain that by putting the portcullis emblem in the window, the then owner of Ightham Mote was sucking up to the king – like someone putting up a Man United poster ahead of a visit from Alex Ferguson. Pat's main piece of advice has finally clicked: adapt to your audience.

I push on, smothering the thought that I sound like the sort of trendy teacher who says: "Yo, you use maths when you work out the beats for your raps." My new tactic reaches its apotheosis when I suggest that the playing cards and letter-writing equipment laid out in the drawing room were the Victorian equivalents of games consoles and Facebook. Luckily there's no need to put a spin on the final item of interest: the only Grade I-listed doghouse in the country, which the children are delighted to climb in and out of. I leave feeling like Catherine Parr: I took on Tudor history, and survived. ■

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ightham-mote

Everyone is looking at me in silence... All of them wondering why I'd want to crush a child's idle fantasy

PHOTOGRAPH RICHARD LEA-HAIR

Composition The arrangement of parts makes the whole – USM combines the purity of color and the strength of form.

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